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Prologue

Morning Glory.

When one heard the name, they assumed it had to do with the flower, and that it was a name given to someone of great status and power.

While that was indeed very true, the she-cat bearing this name felt nothing like a queen at all as she lay in her nest, eyes gazing forlornly at the two cats she'd mothered all her life.

They were sharing moonlight together, grooming each other's fur as they chatted softly with each other, resembling a pair of lions sharing a meal in the light of the dawning horizon.

On one paw, she had a good and steady relationship with her son Jagged Slash. He looked up to her and respected her, and she had been supportive of him when he chose to take Foxglove Heart, his royal advisor, as his mate. He also came to her often for advice, and would usually share prey with her if he wasn't with his mate.

But on the other paw, she had a drastically failing relationship with her daughter. She loved Glacier Storm, really, she did. But her daughter wouldn't accept the fact that she had been manipulated by that grizzly-heart Daisy Fang into believing Glacier Storm was a murderer.

Add in the fact that her daughter was a Dragon Soul and was capable of controlling every element... well, it was a believable lie.

Glacier Storm had returned after her exile during the Cult Invasion, full of hate and anger. She'd transformed from a lively and bubbly she-cat who was happy every day to a cold-hearted, stone-faced killer who snapped at every cat who pushed her limits.

Morning Glory drew a pained sigh. She was happy that her son and daughter had the perfect sibling relationship; they cared for each

other and loved each other dearly. The two also loved their father too, spending time with him very often and taking time to hunt with him.

But no matter how hard she tried, no matter how many times she apologised, Glacier Storm would never forgive her. The last time she tried had ended up with her daughter storming off late into the night, probably to the Golden River or the Ashes Sycamore.

If she couldn't even get along well with her child properly, what good was she to be a queen? She couldn't even convince her daughter to sit on the same side as her on the Blossoming Tree during tribe announcements. Morning Glory rested her head in her paws and curled her tail around her body.

She hoped the Gods above heard her silent prayer; her prayer for her daughter to finally forgive her, and for her stepbrother's lost daughter to finally come home. Her own daughter wouldn't take a mate, and Jagged Slash refused to get a she-cat pregnant and force her life to be stripped away just so she would be a surrogate mother.

The last time the throne ended up in a non-royal's claws had ended up sparking a war. If her children wouldn't get kits to inherit the throne when they passed, the tribe would be in danger. The kin of her stepbrother was her only hope left.

With that thought, she slowly drifted off to sleep, just as the sky turned dark and the Stars twinkled brightly like gemstones on a satin sheet.

Prophecy

"When the Season of Bitter Cold is gone,
The graceful bird listens for the melodious songs.
Kin from a star lost to the cold,
The avian of grace must become bold.
She will fly over the mountain peaks,
Avoiding the sharp-taloned eagles and their beaks.
Her, along with her community,
Must stay together to find their home for all eternity."

A beautiful avian of grace will soar above the peaks, following the songs of glory to complete what the lost star did not.

Allegiances

Leader
Cougarstar- A muscular, golden brown tomcat with tufted ears, a long tail and dark green eyes.
Current Mate: Lilacheart
_____

Royal Heirs
Lichenfrost- A gold-brown she-cat with curled ears, green eyes and a white chest heart.

Beetlescar- A dark chocolate brown tom with tufted ears, a short tail and green-yellow eyes.
_____

Deputy
Azuregale- A sleek silver tom with darker grey stripes and a white underbelly and blue eyes.
_____

Claws
Thornslash- Russet tom with a white belly, chest and tail, tufted ears and green eyes.

Crowcall- A black spotted tabby tom with short fur and amber eyes.

Nightscar- A black furred tom with ebony stripes and yellow eyes.
Titanpaw: Depthpaw

Beechwhisker- Cream mackerel tabby tom with nicked ears and blue eyes.
Titanpaw: Slatepaw

Stormslash- Brown ticked "pseudo tabby" tom with copper eyes and white ears.
Titanpaw: Stonepaw

Firstone- Red spotted "pseudo tabby" tom with hazel eyes and white paws.

Gustfang- Slightly smaller sized grey tabby with darker stripes, green eyes and a white chest and underbelly.

Tigersnap- Apricot mackerel "pseudo-tabby" tom with dark green eyes.

Thrushpounce- A dark grey tabby with black and paler grey striped splotches and a white blaze on his forehead, green-blue eyes, tufted ears and protruding fangs.
Titanpaw: Cootpaw

Weaseltail- A rust-coloured Abyssinian tomcat with nicked ears, pale dusky amber eyes and a black tail tip.

Hornetsting- Brown furred tomcat with medium white spotting, short ears and green eyes.

Cragshade- A red ticked "pseudo tabby" tom with short fur and copper eyes.
Titanpaw: Lionpaw

Stoatsnarl- Cream and brown tom with tufted ears, a long tail and amber eyes.

Pinethorn- A white and dark grey tom with a massive nick in his left ear and brilliant blue eyes

Cobrastrike- A dusky brown tomcat with sandy golden stripes and one green eye and one blue eye.

Stagpounce- Black mackerel tabby tom with short fur and yellow eyes.

Bearclaw- Red classic "pseudo-tabby" tom with short fur and gold eyes.

Talonsnarl- Blue classic tabby tom with long fur and hazel eyes.

Foxfang- Sparse haired red and black mackerel calico tom with green eyes

Sootear- Caramel tom with short fur and green-gold eyes.

Titanpaw: Rockpaw

Snakebelly- White furred tom with cream and blue spotted calico-tabby tail and ears and yellow eyes.

Shines
Sunshimmer- Blue and cream classic tortoiseshell-tabby she-cat with blue and green eyes.
Claw: Firstone
Starpaw: Streampaw

Floralstreak- Short-furred lilac and cream spotted tortoiseshell-tabby she-cat with blue eyes.
Claw: Nightscar
Starpaw: Swanpaw

Petalwhisper- Red mackerel "pseudo tabby" she-cat with short fur and blue eyes.
Claw: Thornslash
Kits: Depthpaw

Featherbreeze- Cream spotted "pseudo-tabby" she-cat with pale yellow eyes and curled ears.
Claw: Stoatsnarl

Starlingspirit- Blue spotted tabby she-cat with sparse fur and amber eyes.
Claw: Gustfang
Kits: Rockpaw, Slatepaw, Stonepaw

Vervainwhisker- Fawn she-cat with a white chest, belly and paws, tufted ears and gold eyes.
Claw: Weaseltail

Chanterellestreak- Blue and cream mackerel calico she-cat with short fur and blue eyes.
Starpaw: Softpaw

Sagethroat- Short-furred white she-cat with black and red spotted calico-tabby tail and ears and green eyes.
Starpaw: Hazelpaw

Claw: Cragshade

Lilynose- Caramel and apricot mackerel calico she-cat with short fur and amber eyes.
Starpaw: Cinderpaw
Claw: Thrushpounce

Lilacheart- Blue and cream tortoiseshell she-cat with white paws and pale green eyes.

Minkstripe- Cinnamon and red classic calico she-cat with curled ears and green eyes.
Starpaw: Honeypaw

Fawnspeckle- Fawn spotted tabby she-cat with long fur and amber eyes.

Rosewater- Long haired lilac and cream mackerel and tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes.
Claw: Stagpounce

Tansytail- Cinnamon and red mackerel tortoiseshell she-cat with pale green eyes.
Claw: Snakebelly

Dovetail- A white and cream she-cat with amber eyes and a long tail.
Kits: Goslingkit and Swankit
Claw: A brown and white mackerel tabby tom with amber eyes who was renamed Blazeclaw, his real name is unknown. (Deceased)

Nettles
Stempetal- Ginger and white tabby with green eyes and tufted ears.

Elmriver- A black and red spotted tortoiseshell-tabby she-cat with amber eyes.

Berrytrail- Short furred black she-cat with small ears and yellow eyes.

Vinespring- Pale brown tabby with darker brown stripes, ebony paws and green-blue eyes.

Aldertrail- Deep brown she-cat with wavy fur, white streaks and green eyes.

Dawnheart- White she-cat with ginger and cream splotches and copper eyes

Willowflutter- Long furred blue mackerel tabby she-cat with green-yellow eyes.

Lotusheart- White and cream she-cat with curled ears, a short tail and gold eyes.

Titanpaws
Depthpaw- Russet tomcat with a white underbelly, curled ears and copper eyes. Son of Thornslash and the most respected out of the Titanpaws.

Lionpaw- Golden mackerel tabby tom with green eyes and a sturdy build.

Slatepaw- Grey tom with darker stripes and blue eyes. The second oldest of his litter and is extremely close to his younger brother Stonepaw. His parents are Gustfang and Starlingspirit.

Stonepaw- A brown-grey tom with darker stripes, a short tail and gold-yellow eyes. The youngest of his litter and is very close to his older brother Slatepaw. His parents are Gustfang and Starlingspirit.

Cootpaw- A cream ticked tabby tomcat with white ears, paws and tail and green eyes.

Rockpaw- A blue-grey tom with darker stripes and green eyes. The oldest of his litter and a huge bully to his younger brothers Slatepaw and Stonepaw. His parents are Gustfang and Starlingspirit.

Starpaws
Swanpaw- Pure white she-cat with amber eyes and a plumed tail, the 'prophecy cat'.

Honeypaw- Golden she-cat with darker swirls, blue eyes and a white underbelly and chest.

Streampaw- Silvery she-cat with dark grey stripes and green eyes.

Cinderpaw- Lilac and cream spotted tortoiseshell she-cat with copper eyes.

Hazelpaw- Cream and white mackerel she-cat with a short tail and hazel eyes.

Softpaw- Mostly white, black and red mackerel tabby-calico she-cat with soft, short fur and gold eyes.

Littlepaws
Goslingpaw- A cream and brown she-cat with saffron eyes, white paws and strange white petal markings under her eyes.

Queens
Cottonsong- A fully white she-cat with wavy fur, a long tail, green eyes and curled ears.
Kits:
Expecting
Claw: Stormslash

Prickles
A skinny sandy pelted she-cat with amber eyes and tufted ears. (Rabbithum)

A grey she-cat with rosettes, blue eyes and a badly torn ear. (Cloudflower)

A pale brown tom with darker patterns, tufted ears, a short tail and green eyes, about the age of a newly-made Claw. (Hazepaw, deceased)

A brown striped tabby with green eyes and multiple scars on her pelt. (Chervilsky)

A white furred calico with unique orange eyes and a scar on her shoulder. (Poppystreak)

Chapter 1: Running Up

Goslingpaw remained quiet as Azuregale and Cougarstar did a role call to check who was missing.

She stood by her mentor, who quietly brushed her tail along her back. The entire clan was gathered by the outskirts of the forest, all standing together.

Most of the clan cats seemed visibly shaken and terrified from the earlier destruction of the forest and their camp, and Goslingpaw was one of them.

Especially since the last thing she saw before escaping was one of her closest friends getting crushed by a falling tree.

She held back a sniffle when she remembered Hazepaw telling her to go and leave him as he died, and recalled the moments they shared in the Prickles den and the stories he'd told her about his apprenticehood before he was demoted to a Prickle.

Aldertrail noticed her expression and quietly rested her tail on the cream and brown Littlepaw's back and murmured that it was going to be okay to try and comfort her.

"*We must leave right now!*" Shouted Cougarstar as he reared up to catch the clan's attention. "*Every cat must come with us. We have to have at least one chance of survival if we are to go into the mountains!*"

His eyes turned to the Prickles. "*Which also means you lot have to come along with us too, unfortunately*."

"*Where's the other one? Hazepaw, is that his name?*" Azuregale asked, referring to the pale brown ex-Titanpaw. "*We don't know*," Rabbithum answered, eyes widening in disbelief and confusion. Goslingpaw choked a sob and replied, "*He's dead*."

All eyes turned to stare at her. "*What do you mean, he's dead?*"

Cloudflower repeated, staring at her. "*He's dead. He was crushed by a falling tree and I couldn't save him.*"

"*Tch. What a failure medicine cat*." Usually, anger would've flared up in her when Cougarstar addressed her as that, but now she was too upset to even care.

"*It doesn't matter anyway. He was useless. The she-cat Prickles are at least capable of bearing kits if we're stuck up there anyway,"* Cougarstar dismissed, using one paw to gesture to the she-cats.

Low hungered growls came from some of the Claws, and Goslingpaw did not dare to look up to see their lust-filled gazes. She didn't even want to lift her head up.

Cougarstar was right, she was a failure. How could she be a healer if she let an innocent cat die before her? She felt tears gathering by her eyes, blurring her vision, and forced herself to blink them away as she pinned her tail tighter to her body.

She would not cry. She would not embarrass herself. "*Don't blame yourself, Goslingpaw*." Her ears perked up when she heard Hazepaw's soft voice call her.

"*I don't blame you; I never will. Complete the journey, if not for me, for Rippling Leaf*." Goslingpaw whispered softly, "*Oh, Hazepaw, I'm so sorry..." "Don't be, Goslingpaw. It's alright. You must stay strong*."

Then the soft sound of chimes ringing echoed out, and she felt his ever-so-familiar scent of pine and ferns wreath around her.

For a moment, as she lifted her head, she thought she saw his faint shape hovering in the air, gazing at her with warm green eyes.

She blinked, and he was gone.

She wanted to curl up and cry; she wanted to see her friend again. But she had to stay strong. When she glanced up, she saw Cougarstar ushering Swanpaw up.

"*Since Swanpaw is our prophecy cat, I will trust her to help lead the clan to safety. She will stand ahead with me and my children, and her*

mother, Dovetail, is also allowed to join us up front as well," Cougarstar meowed.

Goslingpaw gritted her teeth as the clan let out cheers for her arrogant sister as she pridefully bounced forward, her mother right behind.

It only comforted her a little bit when she realised that a couple of cats, Elmriver, Azuregale and Gustfang included, weren't cheering at all, all of whom were her friends or allies on her side.

She bit back a snicker when her sister nearly tripped making her way up to Cougarstar's mighty form.

The brown and cream Littlepaw caught sight of Elmriver rolling her eyes, Stonepaw making an exaggerated expression and Depthpaw mocking Swanpaw behind his father's back, and she giggled softly.

"*Are we all ready to go?*" Cougarstar demanded. "*We are-*" Azuregale began, but was cut off when Rabbithum said, "*I'm not. I'm staying here.*"

All eyes turned to stare at the elderly Prickle. "*What?*" Goslingpaw's voice came as a barely audible squeak.

She'd already lost Hazepaw. She couldn't lose Rabbithum too. The elderly she-cat gazed at her with pale eyes flashing wth warmth and pain.

"*I am old, and my limbs are weary. I cannot travel nor can I walk without feeling sore, and I have no way of running from danger. I feel it would be best if I stayed here to grieve and sit vigil for Hazepaw instead of slowing you down,*" she rasped, her patchy, bony limbs doing little to support her near-skeletal frame.

The three remaining Prickles quietly leaned over to say their farewells, their soft voices full of longing and remorse.

In return, Rabbithum wrapped her ragged tail around them and murmured softly to them, comforting them and reassuring them.

Goslingpaw was surprised to see some of the other BlazeClan cats

were gazing at the elderly she-cat with newfound respect, and she overheard Crowcall whisper softly to Stagpounce, "*I don't think I'll ever be brave enough to make a sacrifice like that*."

Cougarstar wasn't as respectful, however, and barked impatiently, "*Hurry up, hussy! We have to leave*." Rabbithum coiled her raggedy tail back and stared at him coldly.

"*All in good time,*" she hissed icily, before turning to Goslingpaw. She limped over, and Aldertrail pulled her tail away from the Littlepaw's back so the elderly Prickle could speak to her.

"*You are brave, small one. Do not let others' words or actions get to your head. Just be yourself*," Rabbithum meowed softly, her warm amber eyes meeting the cream and brown Littlepaw's own saffron ones.

Goslingpaw choked back a sob as she leaned forward and pressed her head against Rabbithum's patchy chest, feeling the bare spots from where her fur was gone, torn off to make nests that would provide comfort yet ultimately be destroyed in the end.

When they pulled away, Rabbithum turned to the rest of BlazeClan. She bowed down, surprisingly rather elegantly, and meowed, "*I wish you best of luck on your journey*."

With a scornful huff, Cougarstar whirled around and stalked off, not even saying thanks. Majority of the clan followed him, and Swanpaw and Dovetail looked at her with disgust before walking off.

The other three Prickles brushed their pelts against Rabbithum's casting glances of sadness at the elder before they moved forward, and Goslingpaw found herself watching forlornly as the sandy-pelted she-cat limped off into the forest that was being destroyed to rubble.

She whimpered as she felt Aldertrail rest her tail on her back once more and guided her forward in the direction of the teetering mountain once the sandy-furred elder's patchy tail vanished through the shrubs.

Her foster mother gazed at her, pain clear in her leaf-green eyes. "*You must move on, my darling. No matter how hard it is*." Goslingpaw hung her head and nodded miserably as she followed the rest of BlazeClan.

Two cats were already gone.

How many more would drop like flies before they got to their new home?

Chapter 2: Ridged Ravines

As the clan soon came to realise, climbing a mountain was no easy feat. They had grown from two small rocks to giant rocky formations that seemed to pierce the sky as the clan approached.

The mountain was like a craggy mass of stone; dangerous cliffs that seemed to sway at the slightest breeze, and the small branches that grew from the crevices were gnarled and stunted.

The air grew cold as they tried to climb up, and Goslingpaw gave a shiver from the chill.

They would've flown if they had wings like a bird, but knowing Cougarstar, the she-cats would have never learned to fly a day in their lives.

The only she-cats who would probably even remotely knew how to fly and glide would be both his daughter Lichenthorn and Swanpaw, and even they couldn't possibly fly as well as the toms probably could.

Goslingpaw did some thinking and wondered what would happen if cats did have wings. She'd remembered a story Rabbithum told her of legendary cats who lived far far away from RoadWalker civilisation, all who had wings that could send them to the skies and above.

She imagined what would happen if the BlazeClan cats had wings to even remotely make their journey a little easier, but thought of multiple cons that would come along due to their way of life.

Even though the Shines could have healthy gleaming wings, she supposed, they would do nothing useful except get frostbitten and lose their feathers when the cold shrivelled and withered them like leaves on the trees in the Moons of Snow.

They wouldn't be able to fly at all; the only thing the Shines would

ever be taught to use their wings for was to attract the toms.

The Nettles' wings would be in even worse condition. Save for Elmriver, whose own ones would be strong and have a rather wide wingspan and Aldertrail, who she remembered was coached by the slightly older and more muscular healer out of a rebellious phase, majority of the BlazeClan healers would've had wings could never be used to fly.

Their feathers would seem rather abnormal, with strange structures and growths, and they would most likely be duller than the bare stone crags before them.

The skin underneath the wings could be flaky, and some of the Nettles' feathers, from the primaries to the plummels, would've been withered due to lack of blood circulation from constant slashes by the Claws in a bad mood.

Goslingpaw flattened her own ears to her head tighter when she imagined the worrisome healers Lotusheart and Vinespring fretting over prolonged molting while Dawnheart and Berrytrail discreetly cleaned the blood from their pin feathers after their own molting.

She knew winged cats couldn't possibly exist, but it didn't help that her imagination had a tendency to always run wild.

She decided if the toms had decided to take off and leave most of the she-cats to fend for themselves, not only would they not be able to get more kits in case they had to start a new life at the top of the mountains, but they also would not be able to heal themselves as none of the toms knew a thing about healing as the Nettles.

Goslingpaw gritted her teeth as the icy chill seeped through her fur and into her bones. It was cold, her paws ached, and most of all she was getting ready to take a downwards spiral off the cliff because of her sister's constant whining and complaining.

"*I'm cold! I'm tired! I'm hungry! My paws hurt! I want to rest! My fur will get so dirty!*" Swanpaw kept wailing, and Dovetail kept trying to coax her and tell her it would be alright as they continued to climb the perilous peaks.

Goslingpaw could swear that she saw Cougarstar's eye twitch.

Up ahead, the Prickles were all helping Cottonsong, with Cloudflower on her left, Chervilsky on her right and Poppystreak herding them all from the rear. They were surprisingly resilient, and carried on steadily while showing no signs of slowing down or stopping.

The Claws were also trekking at a careful pace, keeping the Titanpaws in the center of them so they didn't risk any chance of falling off the narrow, crumbly path they were trekking up. Thornslash was in the lead, his son securely by his side.

In the middle of them were the Shines, all pressed together with fear. They huddled together, softly whispering and fretting about their pelts and fur. The Starpaws were also huddled in the middle of the group, eyes wide with terror and tails rigid with the cold.

The Nettles were all at the back, silently but carefully trudging behind the clan with their heads down. None of them spoke, and their eyes held raw exhaustion as they climbed the peaks that seemed to tower above them.

Elmriver's hulking form towered over the smaller Nettles, shielding them from the shrieking winds and icy cold.

Goslingpaw cast a look at Aldertrail, and felt her heart wrench when she saw how tired and weakened her foster mother looked. There seemed to be no end to the clambering as the terrain grew steeper, rockier, and harder to climb.

Goslingpaw flinched as her paw was scraped against a sharp stone, but forced herself to carry on.

The trail they were on had led them onto a ledge spiralling around a dizzying gorge that seemed like the earth had split open into a chasm.

The towering mountains fell away at one side of the path, rising up on the other, and the shrieking winds assaulted the Littlepaw's ears, rushing through the gap like water through a broken dam.

The BlazeClan cats had to fall into a single line to weave their way along the narrow ledge, which followed the mountain's great curve and sloped up towards a narrow entryway between two peaks.

Echoes of the rattling stones sounded out as the path crumbled down into the chasm below, and Goslingpaw presses herself against the rocky wall tighter as she felt her mentor's warm breath behind her.

"*Be careful, my baby*," murmured Aldertrail, her green eyes flickering with exhaustion yet still held the gentle embers of determination in them. "*If you feel cold, please tell me*." Goslingpaw mutely nodded and smiled weakly at her foster mother.

She wondered how Azuregale was doing at the front right now at that moment. They'd only been apart for a couple hours since they started the trek up the tall mountains, but it felt like days.

A violent shiver ripped through her body as another chilling gust howled, shrieking it's mournful wail.

Suddenly, an almighty crack sounded up ahead, and the shrillest, terror-filled screech rang out up ahead as a massive chunk of craggy rock clattered down into the endless abyss.

A massive gap yawned open in the narrow path, and Goslingpaw spotted a familiar dusky brown tom clinging desperately to the ledge. "*HELP ME!*" He shrieked, his claws scrabbling fearfully against the stone.

Goslingpaw peeked to the side, and saw the heterochromiac tom trying to haul himself up to save himself, but his fur was snagged on the gnarled branches of something growing between the stones, and Goslingpaw bit back a gasp when she realised that the ugly hooked branches had torn most of his fur off.

She watched as Azuregale suddenly launched forward, his silver pelt gleaming against the light as he manoeuvred his way past the Claws and towards Cobrastrike, and surge forward to get to the the shunned BlazeClan cat.

But the mere strength of his pawsteps was enough to break the already fragile stone, sending the incapacitated tom plummeting down below as the smaller crumbles of stone showered down, his scream cut off as a faraway crack was heard.

Goslingpaw felt like crying out to her foster father when she saw the look of absolute horror on his face. Up ahead, Cougarstar shouted, "*Get the remaining cats across! Don't just stand there like a star-blinded hare!*"

Azuregale's eyes flashed with an unreadable emotion before he actually leapt into action.

Because Cobrastrike had been sentenced to the lowest Claw rank in the clan, he'd been forced to walk behind the Shines and Starpaws, so most of them were already up ahead where the rock was before Cobrastrike fell.

Only Chanterellestreak and Softpaw were still there, eyes flashing with alarm and fear.

Azuregale perched on the teetering end of the broken-away ledge, flinching as another shower of small pebble chunks clattered into the chasm below.

Bending down so Softpaw could climb into his back, Azuregale snuck a glance at Goslingpaw and Aldertrail. His eyes were full of worry.

Once the Starpaw was reloaded onto his back, Azuregale waggled his haunches and leapt into the sky, landing down to the other ledge to let the terrified Starpaw down.

He turned to Chanterellestreak, who shook her head and leapt over the gaping hole after waggling her own haunches.

She was quite a good leaper, it seemed, as she cleared the space with no difficulty at all. She bowed to Azuregale briefly, before hurrying up ahead with her apprentice, who shot a frightened look down at the abyss before looking back at the path.

It was also just then Goslingpaw realised that the cats of BlazeClan

who had been ahead before the ledge cracked had already started moving forward, and she gnashed her teeth with annoyance at their selfishness for not waiting for their own deputy.

One by one, the Nettles, who were surprisingly graceful and quick despite their skinny undernourished selves, leapt over the gap, not wanting to risk plummeting down lest they tried to fly.

Elmriver crossed over with no difficulty at all, and before long Goslingpaw found herself nudged to the front by Aldertrail, the last healer left.

The piddly bits of crumbly rock rolled under her paws, filling her with discomfort. Her foster mother seemed anxious, and glanced to Azuregale for help.

The white-striped deputy seemed really nervous too, as he had not a clue what he was supposed to do to help his foster daughter and risk her getting injured.

Taking a deep breath, Goslingpaw moved her haunches and leapt, but she came about a hair-length short from the ledge. She let out a yelp as she clung on, and exhaled a sigh of relief when Azuregale gripped her scruff and hauled her up in time.

She watched as her mentor and foster mother launched herself swiftly over the gap, and pressed herself between her foster parents as they tried to catch up with the clan.

Both older cats stared down and their adopted daughter with worry, yet she still soldiered on bravely despite the cold.

She ***would*** live to see her new home, for Hazepaw, for Rabbithum and for Rippling Leaf, if it was the last thing she did.

Chapter 3: Dashing Through The Ice

Goslingpaw pricked her ears at the sound of a shrieking eagle's cry overhead. Birds of prey were never a good sign, especially in a place as steep and dangerous as this.

She bit her lip nervously and pressed closer between her foster parents, who glanced down at her in worry.

"*Stay strong, my daughter,*" Azuregale murmured quietly, mist billowing in small clouds out of his nose as he exhaled a breath of the icy air. "*I will not lose you in this journey*." She felt his furry silver tail draped over both her and Aldertrail's backs, and shuffled closer to him.

The howling winds only shrieked higher and louder, and she flattened her sensitive ears in annoyance.

Up ahead, the clan was still hiking, all the cats packed together tighter now so to avoid having the same accident as Cobrastrike.

Suddenly, a pain-filled scream ripped through the air, which was followed by a shriek of panic from Poppystreak. "*COTTONSONG IS KITTING!*" Aldertrail's eyes went wide and she gasped, "*What?!*"

Quickly shaking off Azuregale's tail as he made a noise of dismay and surprise, she draped her own tail over Goslingpaw and pulled her forward as they nimbly ran towards the pregnant Shine who was howling with agony as spasms of clear, sharp pain tore through her body.

The cats ahead had stopped too, and were looking back at the commotion.

"*What's happening?!*" Shouted Lichenfrost. "*Cottonsong is kitting!*" Elmriver hollered back. "*Is there a small cavern or something similar*

around here for her to give birth where it'll actually be safe?!"

The minute they heard the word kitting, the cats ahead burst into uproar.

Beetlescar and his sister both hurried to the back and got the weakened Shine to her paws before they and the Prickles and Nettles hurried her up ahead to where a tiny, cramped space yawned open on the side of the wall.

The toms parted for them to get through, and Goslingpaw spotted Gustfang brush all the twigs and leaves away from the area so the kitting wouldn't be so uncomfortable for the poor white she-cat.

Much to her irritation, she had also heard some of the toms congratulating Cottonsong's mate Stormslash for 'knocking up and getting a hussy pregnant' and bared her teeth angrily.

Most of the toms never cared for their mates; all that mattered was status and both the gender and appearance of their kits.

A wail of agony yanked her from her thoughts and she jolted back to see Cottonsong being ushered into the small space and the royal heirs backing up to let the healers deal with it.

Chervilsky turned to Goslingpaw and her mentor and called out, "*Can you get some sticks?"*

Nodding, Aldertrail took her cream and brown Littlepaw to a certain spot on the trail where a couple of almost leafless plants grew, their branches bare, ugly and gnarled.

Aldertrail bent down, and meowed, "*Get on my back and stand up on your hind legs, see if you can reach the branches that way*."

Quickly obeying her foster mother's words, she stepped onto the brown she-cat's back carefully, and as her mentor slowly stood up, she pressed her weight onto her back legs and planted her front paws against the craggy wall to support herself.

Reaching a paw up with her claws fully out to snag the branches, they hooked around one of the frostbitten leaves still dangling from

the branches and she yanked it down. To her relief, the branch didn't crumble when she pulled, and instead fell to the icy ground.

Hopping off her foster mother's back, she grabbed the stick and nimbly pelted towards the cavern, Aldertrail close behind her.

When she squeezed in, she hurriedly dropped the stick at the white queen's paws, and Cottonsong managed a weak smile before another obvious cramp seized her belly and she screamed to the heavens.

Aldertrail quickly put her paw over Goslingpaw's eyes and muttered quietly to her, "*This is not for you to see, my little wildflower. You will learn about this, perhaps when you're a little bit older*."

When Goslingpaw looked like she was about to protest, the brown she-cat fixed her with a stern glare.

Normally, the cream and brown she-cat would've started to complain, but when she heard the howls of pain that kept coming from Cottonsong and saw that the stick had already splintered and snapped when Cottonsong bit down too hard, she knew she didn't want to stick around to see what kit-birth looked like.

Before she could do anything, however, an almighty screech that sounded like an eagle's pierced the air, and it was followed by a loud yell of terror, then Gustfang bellowed, "*STONEPAW!*" and loud shrieks of panic sounded out shortly after.

Squeezing herself out just as Cottonsong pushed out her first kit, to her horror, she saw a massive eagle lifting off into the air with her grey-furred friend clamped between its hellish, stalactite-like talons.

The grey Titanpaw was struggling to get free, but to no avail as the bird of prey soared higher and higher.

There was high risk leaping to the air to get the Titanpaw; the toms were heavier with muscle than the she-cats, and one wrong accidental misstep or too much pressure exerted on the rocky footholds would lead to the path crumbling and possible deaths.

One thought flashed into her head. Summoning all her strength,

Goslingpaw concentrated hard and soon the feeling of fire blazed behind her eyes.

She envisioned a vine snaring the eagle, thorns digging into the great avian's body like claws of flames, and gritted her teeth as the intensity of the feeling grew.

Suddenly, an almighty crack was heard, and a loud yell of surprise was heard. When she opened her eyes once the feeling stopped, she gasped at the marvellous sight.

Indeed, a massive mass of vines had twined together and reached up for the bird, and once they had caught it, had clasped thorny tendrils around its feathery body and began to squeeze.

The eagle screeched, and flailed about wildly as the tendrils grew tighter and tighter. It's talons unhooked from Stonepaw and gave the small grey tom enough time to swipe his claws at its face and race down the vines to his waiting father.

Gustfang lashed his stumpy tail in fear for his son, and Stonepaw zipped into his father's embrace, trembling out of fear.

"*Hey! Couldn't you have killed the eagle for us to eat as well?*" Protested Lionpaw. Gustfang whirled around and glared daggers at the Titanpaw. "*My son was nearly killed and the only thing you can think of is food? You are unbelievable and greedy, Lionpaw!*"

The golden tom froze and cowered back in alarm as his mentor, Cragshade, gave him a disapproving glare. Goslingpaw snorted under her breath. He deserved it, she thought, recalling the times he'd steal her food and mock her about it back home.

Home.

Where was it?

Would her home even be welcoming to her?

Her thoughts were interrupted when the clan cats started to congratulate Swanpaw, thanking her for saving Stonepaw because she clearly had the powers for being the oh-so great prophecy cat

and that it clearly wasn't her sister trying to save her best friend and all that whatnot.

Goslingpaw huffed and looked away as her sister gave her a smug, dung-eating smirk at the attention she was given. Slatepaw was by his brother's side, checking if he was alright, then both younger Granite brothers turned to her and mouthed a '*thank you*'.

At least not all the BlazeClan cats were idiots, she sighed as she shot them a weary smile and mouthed back, '*you're welcome*'.

Then, she heard a final agonised shriek and Berrytrail called out, "*Four healthy kits! Three toms and a little she-kit! Congratulations!*"

The kitting has gone well, and Cottonsong's kits were alright. Goslingpaw sighed as she felt a weight off her shoulders when her foster mother poked her head out and smiled at her before she gestured for her to make her way into the crevice to see the four new bundles of joy.

Goslingpaw immediately took the chance to see the kits before they were brought out into the harsh, harsh world of the cold rocky grounds and BlazeClan's harsh society.

Chapter 4: Quest For Shelter

Goslingpaw swore she hadn't realised kits were so small.

She stared with interest as one of her foster mother's closest friends, Elmriver, gripped one of Cottonsong's kits, the third-born one, gently between her teeth. The kit, a little tom, let out occasional little squeals as they trotted up the ledge.

It hadn't been wise to take the kits from Cottonsong after she'd given birth, let alone after they'd just suckled too, but they had to keep moving.

They just had to. Goslingpaw heaved a sigh when they finally managed to reach a stretch of flat ground.

The oldest kit, Ripplekit, was a brown-ticked tabby tom with green eyes and curled ears. His second-born brother, Icekit, was a white tom with a long tail and copper eyes.

Hailkit was the third born, with brown wavy fur, copper eyes and white ears, and the last kit, Mousekit, was a white splashed brown she-cat with green eyes, wavy fur and curled ears.

Immediately after they'd been born, Stormslash had already balked at the mere idea of cleaning the kits, and had been both disappointed and annoyed that the litter wasn't completely made of toms.

But the healers and Cottonsong were even more horrified to realise that Icekit was partially deaf.

They didn't tell anyone out of fear Cougarstar would demand the small kit's life to be ended.

Goslingpaw shivered in the cold, and her foster mother's soft tail over her body did little to both soothe her pounding heart and warm her up. She glanced up ahead, squinting as the snowy cold

nipped at her face.

The BlazeClan cats all looked beyond bedraggled, and up ahead, she saw Cougarstar herding both his children with his brown bushy tail, and Swanpaw and Dovetail with Azuregale unwillingly behind.

Once again, the white Starpaw was continuously complaining and protesting about the cold, and Goslingpaw felt the urge to hurl snow at her face to shut her up.

Cougarstar had also shouted that they had to find some sort of shelter, as it was clear as day the kits wouldn't survive if they remained out in the cold any further.

Swanpaw has started proclaiming she had a vision and knew where to go, and Dovetail obviously supported her claim.

Goslingpaw could swear they'd walked past the same tree for the seventh ***(or probably the ninth or tenth)*** time already.

The cream and brown Littlepaw pricked up her ears, however, as the sound of soft tinkling bells chimed somewhere above her. The gentle chiming seemed to sing a soft melody, its tones gentle and cheery, yet strong and determined.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw something flash; something only she could see. Turning her head slightly, a soft gasp escaped her mouth when she saw Rippling Leaf's spirit standing there, soft golden eyes twinkling like sunshine reflected in a pool of water.

"*Father!*" She whispered softly, eyes wide as her father locked eyes with her. He smiled, a genuine smile full of warmth and affection towards his daughter, and flared open his wings and took to the sky.

Goslingpaw made a small noise of dismay. She wanted to yell for him to come back, but she'd look like she was losing her mind. She watched forlornly as he bounded away, leaping through the snow and leaving starry tracks behi- wait.

Then, she realised what he was doing. He leaped over the clan with a mighty bound, and started cantering in one direction, creating

starry paw prints on the ground. Goslingpaw felt her heart beat faster when she remembered her dream those moons ago.

Rippling Leaf was leading her to safety.

The translucent spirit paused, then turned to her and gave her a warm smile. "*Aren't you coming?*" His soft voice rang out in her ears, his soft accent sounding positively melodic and cheery to her ears.

Then, he released a soft whistle that echoed through the air, singing merrily like warbling birds.

Goslingpaw learned that whistles were a very interesting thing for the winged cats in the old tales. Each one was unique just like their voices. But that's only the starting.

Some whistles sing out longer, some come out slightly more clipped, and some come in short, sharp bursts, to warn others to get out of sight when something might be amiss.

It's a language in and of itself.

And many of those unique creatures, in a world so small but so full of interpersonal strife, have unique whistles for each other and the bond they share.

Two winged cats could whistle cheekily to one another, sharing secret codes that only they understand. They could whistle together, finishing each other's sentences.

And some of their more patient whistles were only reserved for those they held dear to their heart, to bring their loved ones back under their wing.

And Rippling Leaf's own whistle seemed to be calling to her, telling her to follow him.

Wriggling out from under her foster mother's tail over her back, she immediately began bounding after her father, ignoring her mentor's yell of surprise and calling her to come back.

Her paws felt like canary wings as she leapt and bounded through

the snow, following the starry tracks her father lay down for her to follow.

Her father's sweet, sharp whistles roused her from any sorts of distractions, and soon became the only thing she focused on as she dashed to catch up with him.

She was only faintly aware of her mentor, and the rest of BlazeClan running after her, and she remembered once again that even if Cougarstar wanted to, he couldn't afford to lose a healer right now.

Especially since she had proved to be a very vital asset to the clan with her excellent memory and excellent healing skills.

Her father's cheeky whistles sounded like birdsong, twittering and warbling as he bounded effortlessly through the snowy ground. Goslingpaw struggled to keep up with him due to how small she was compared to him, and along with a strange ache in her back.

She ignored the sting in her paws and the sore sensations on her back as she pursued her father, the clan behind her as they called for her to come back.

Well, most of them anyway.

She could hear Aldertrail's desperate cries, the younger Granite brothers calling her name and Gustfang bellowing, "*Littlepaw! Get your tail back here! You're going to get in danger if you keep moving in this terrain!*"

Suddenly, Goslingpaw spotted her father come to a halt. She tiredly bounded up to him, and he smiled at her before using his wing to gesture to a massive mound partially hidden by the ice and sleet.

Her gaze following the direction he was pointing in, Goslingpaw saw a wide entrance yawning open, the roof of the cave being covered in icicles.

"*Over there, my little hatchling, is the cave that sheltered a pair of forbidden lovers many, many moons ago when they left the forest. Go there with your clan, and you will have shelter.*"

He paused and smiled down at her gently. "*A frozen little hatchling won't grow up to be a big strong snow goose, you know.*"

Goslingpaw felt a sting in her eyes at the affectionate nickname and gazed up at her father. "*Dad, please... don't leave...*" she whimpered, staring up at her father with what she hoped was a longing glance.

She couldn't bear to be torn apart from her birth father after not knowing him for so long. It hurt when her one biological parent who really loved her left even if it was only for a while.

Rippling Leaf stared at her, eyes full of love. He leaned down, wrapping a wing around his daughter, and murmured softly, "*I will always be with you.*"

Goslingpaw closed her eyes and breathed in his soft scent as he faded away, and listened to his soft fading whistle that seemed to reassure her that he would never truly leave her behind.

Suddenly, she felt a weight land on her back, along with the familiar scent of pine nuts and ferns that Slatepaw always carried with him wherever he went. "*Goslingpaw!*" He shouted.

"*Are you nuts?! Why'd you run off?!*" As she felt the middle Granite brother press his paws harder on her back, she felt a sharp throb of pain sear through the two areas near her shoulders that had been aching for a while.

She let out a wrangled cry of pain, and Slatepaw tumbled off her back faster than a squirrel after pine nuts that had fallen to the ground. "*I'm sorry, did I hurt you?!*" He started to panic.

"*No, you silly quack!*" She laughed weakly while trying to gather some air back into her lungs after her breath had been knocked out by the ambush.

"*There's a cave over there, something was telling me to go in this direction and I found it,*" she explained, just as the rest of BlazeClan came into closer proximity of her.

She cast a discreet wink at Slatepaw and he immediately seemed to understand what the 'something' was really referring to.

Cougarstar cut off whatever Slatepaw was about to say next by snarling, "*Pathetic attention-seeking Littlepaw, trying to get the spotlight by acting up, huh?*"

Goslingpaw bit her tongue to stop herself from snapping back at Cougarstar, and just buried her paws into the snow and sheathed and unsheathed her claws angrily while Slatepaw looked between them with a nervous expression.

Cougarstar sneered down at Goslingpaw but didn't say anything more, instead just shoving past her roughly and heading towards the cave.

His children glared at Goslingpaw, clear jealousy welling deep in their eyes. They spat at her paws, causing the cream and brown she-cat to flinch and move away slightly before they stormed off after their father.

When Dovetail and Swanpaw came into view, she winced and braced herself, and inside she thanked Slatepaw mentally when he pressed up against her defensively, his hackles raised.

"I could've found the cave!" Swanpaw wailed, shooting her older sister a discreet death glare. "*She stole my spotlight!*"

Her mother glared at her and snarled coldly, "*Doesn't matter, my beautiful daughter. She's still useless anyway, compared to you, she's just a savage animal.*" Then they stalked off, and Goslingpaw choked back a horrified gasp at what her mother had said.

As the rest of BlazeClan streamed past into the cave, most of the toms giving her occasional glares and sneers, she was startled by a sudden warmth against both sides of her pelt.

Glancing up, she was relieved to see Azuregale and Aldertrail beside her, their eyes full of relief.

No words needed to be said; her foster parents knew she was only trying to help the clan. They leaned down and nuzzled her gently, before Aldertrail nudged her in the direction of the cave.

Her foster father nudged Slatepaw forward just as Stonepaw,

Softpaw and Chanterellestreak padded over, and together the last remainders of BlazeClan treaded into the cave.

As they made their way in, Goslingpaw hesitated and gazed back. A simple melody from the voices she'd been hearing streamed over to her ears, and as quickly as they came, they were gone.

A soft whistle pierced the air, and Goslingpaw felt her heart ache as she turned and followed her mentor into the cave.

"*I'll make you proud, Rippling Leaf,*" she vowed silently. "*I'll show every cat what a real medicine cat is capable of.*"

Chapter 5: Cave Exploring

The steady dripping noise of water from the thinly formed ice that veiled the cave walls sent a quiver up Goslingpaw's spine.

The soreness in her paws from running through the thick, icy snow did little to at least balance her small form, so she was grateful for her foster family by her sides.

She flinched when Azuregale brushed his tail over one of the bumps that had sprouted on her back seemingly out of nowhere about two moons ago, and a sharp pain shot through the area near her shoulder blades even at the slightest touch.

Gritting her teeth, she forced herself to carry on walking so she wouldn't appear weak; she was still beside the clan deputy, and she didn't want to show more weakness than she already had back before the forest was destroyed.

Up ahead, the Slate and Stone brothers were pressed together, wide eyes staring at the cave walls thinly veiled with melting ice and the icicles and stalactites that hung from the roof of the cave.

Stonepaw seemed really nervous, and Slatepaw draped his tail over his little brother's back, mumbling words of comfort softly to him.

Deep down, Goslingpaw felt pity that the younger Granite Brothers had such a terrible older brother; Rockpaw took every chance he could to bully his brothers and scorn them, and because of the injustice against she-cats and weakness coupled with Cougarstar's sick desire for perfection, there was absolutely no punishment dished out for Rockpaw when he was caught picking on his brothers.

She exhaled, feeling the cool dewy wetness of her breath as mist billowed out her nose. She swore she could hear her own bones rattling with each and every step she took.

Aldertrail looked at her tiredly, crystalline green eyes twinkling like a beam of sunlight on the water surface of a pond.

She sighed softly and rested her head atop her apprentice's briefly before gently nudging her forward. They all soon came to a stop further in the cave, where the rest of BlazeClan had assembled.

Azuregale gently tapped her head affectionately with his tail before bounding off and leaping up onto a giant mass of rock that Cougarstar and his children were perched on. Goslingpaw quivered, and pressed up against Aldertrail in a mixture of fear and worry.

Her gaze landed on Gustfang and Starlingspirit as they hurriedly bounded towards Slatepaw and Stonepaw, and began fussing over them in concern when they saw Stonepaw shivering violently.

She felt a small smile curl up on her lips as she watched the two younger grey toms nestle into their parents fur as a way to keep warm, while Gustfang and Starlingspirit began rubbing the brothers' fur the opposite way to warm them up. At least their parents cared.

Silently, she gazed around her, feeling the cold from the icy stone floor seep into her bones as Aldertrail pulled her closer, feeling their body heat as a way to preserve at least some warmth.

She caught sight of Cottonsong curling her body protectively around her kits after they were given back to her, and she felt a small twinge of jealousy.

Those kits had a loving mother, one who cared about them dearly and would never push them away for all the prey in the world.

What did she have? A deceased father, a spoiled, bratty sister and a mother who wouldn't even bat an eye if she died.

Goslingpaw sighed and stomped all those thoughts down to the back of her head. They were just kits, what was there to be jealous of? The cream and brown Littlepaw still had a foster family who loved her, at least.

No matter how hard she thought, no other she-cat would be able to match Aldertrail's sage and gentle demeanour, and no tom would

match Azuregale's steadfastness and determination.

"*And you also have Rippling Leaf, Softpaw, and the Granite brothers*," a small voice at the back of her head whispered, and Goslingpaw shifted slightly.

Her thoughts were interrupted when Cougarstar let out a yowl that reverberated through the cavern walls like booming thunder.

She bit back a hiss as her sister and mother hopped onto the ledge with some difficulty and peered down at the clan, glaring smugly at her.

She stamped down the urge to caterwaul at them to rip that smirk off their faces and seethed silently as she unsheathed and sheathed her claws repeatedly.

Aldertrail must've sensed her anger, because a low hiss rumbled in her throat and she gave her a sharp glare.

Goslingpaw scowled and reluctantly sheathed her claws. She stared daggers at the royals and the 'prophecy cat and her 'glorious mother' as Cougarstar began to speak.

"*Cats of BlazeClan*!" Bellowed the massive brown tom as he lashed his fluffy tail. "*It has appeared this is our only form of shelter in this barren wasteland of snow and ice. We have no other choice but to set up camp in here!*"

Yowls of confusion ripped through the air, and all of a sudden, Thornslash shouted, "*Why should we stay in here if our designated prophecy cat isn't even the one who led us here?! This cave could be cursed for all we know!*"

Goslingpaw gasped and glared at the russet tom with anger boiling deep in her gut as multiple BlazeClan cats turned to stare at her with distrust clear on their faces.

Their attention was ripped away from her when a steely laugh ripped through the atmosphere and Azuregale slowly drew himself up to his full height, looking ever so menacing and regal.

His icy blue eyes scanned the clan and he sneered in a voice colder than the mountain peaks, "*Feel free to go and find more shelter out there on your own then. I hear the caves out there are much warmer than this current one in the deathly cold out there*."

His voice dripped with clear sarcasm and venom, and that was enough to send the clan settling back down in fear. Yes, Azuregale was nowhere as big or as muscular as Cougarstar, but what he lacked in size and strength he made up for in skill and his terrifying nature.

There was something uncanny about the BlazeClan deputy; maybe his chilling tone when he was angry, the way his pupils slitted till they were barely visible or maybe the fact he could be quiet and stoic one moment and explosive and enraged the next in unpredictable times.

Goslingpaw took note of the fact that Thornslash also had a lot of emotions warring on his face. There was anger, confusion, sadness, and... was she dreaming or was that heartbreak? The cream and brown Littlepaw narrowed her eyes at Thornslash.

Goslingpaw happened to be quite good at reading emotions and hence could easily tell if a cat was faking their demeanour or not, and Thornslash was showing clear signs that he was somewhat heartbroken over something.

Azuregale glanced over at Cougarstar, seeking permission to speak, and when the larger tom nodded, the silver tabby turned his gaze back to the clan and continued to address them.

"*I want the Claws to split up into groups to scour this cave. Bring at least one Titanpaw with you. Shines will stay in this area with your Starpaws to avoid any further trouble*."

His gaze flicked over to Aldertrail and her, and his eyes softened slightly. "*The Nettles will assist in searching for suitable resting places and set up a makeshift healing camp or a nursery and move Cottonsong and her kits there.*"

He flicked his gaze back to the gathered BlazeClan cats when he

had addressed them, and narrowed his eyes. "*Any objections?*" He hissed.

There was no objections as every cat sprang into action immediately, splitting into groups and quickly moving forward to scour their new home for the next time period.

Goslingpaw watched through narrowed eyes as Cougarstar led his children and both Swanpaw and Dovetail away to a more comfortable area, purring that, "*Prophecy cats deserve the very best*" as they left. She scowled and looked away.

If her kin wanted to be useless, so be it.

Her spirits were lightened as Azuregale padded over and smiled down at her. He and Aldertrail bumped heads lightly for a moment before they split off in their own little group to explore the darkened wonders of the cavern ahead.

Chapter 6: Parenting 101

"You're kidding!"
"Am not!"
"There's no way you found that! It doesn't even look real!"
"I did find it, and it could be real!"

Goslingpaw gaped as the Granite brothers pulled out the skull of a massive animal with a narrow face and tree branches on its head.

"*Get that thing away from me!*" She yelped, jumping away as Slatepaw started moving it closer to her, a mischievous grin on his face.

As it turned out, exploring the cave unearthed many secrets hidden within as the six patrols had discovered, For one thing, Beechwhisker's patrol had discovered the skeleton of a huge unknown animal in one corner of the cave, along with the old fading smell of blood and decaying meat stuck on the bone.

Stormslash's patrol had found a small opening yawning open to lead into a small dip in the cave, and since Cottonsong was the only queen she had been moved there with her kits.

Gustfang's patrol had found a section of the back of the cave where there were small, flat stones sticking up and jagged rocks hanging from the walls above, and the Nettles decided to use that as a makeshift healing station.

Thornslash's patrol discovered another dip in the cave where a small pool had formed, with water dripping from an unknown source on the top wall of the rock, and it had been labeled as the drinking hole.

The patrol led by Nightscar had found narrow ledges that served as some sort of climbing wall for unknown purposes, and had been deemed as a safety hazard and was marked off with sharp stones.

The one led by Cragshade, Lionpaw's mentor, had found a secret tunnel that led to a small hidden area on the cave ceiling, which was basically a rocky ledge big enough to fit two apprentice-sized cats.

Again, it was deemed a safety hazard and was marked off with sharp rocks to deter the apprentices from finding it and doing something risky and potentially cause a death.

And as for Azuregale's mini patrol, they had discovered something strange. An old carving on the rock wall of the cave depicted what looked like a cat with wings bowing to the sun, and messy text was scribbled underneath with a strange, dark red liquid with a weird consistency.

Goslingpaw felt a strange sense of familiarity upon seeing the text, and couldn't seem to quite put her paw on it. Had she seen it before?

The text read, "*Tyria Hjisa Osiko Shimr*", and there seemed to be something weirdly ancient about the words that didn't sit right with her.

Still, the Littlepaw had dismissed it and followed her foster parents back out to the clearing, where her foster mother had gone to help the healers set up and Azuregale went to report his findings to Cougarstar.

Initially, Goslingpaw had wanted to go and help out, but her foster mother insisted she should rest for now.

Currently, she was watching and laughing at Slatepaw when he began chasing his brother around with the skull as she nestled into a miniature dip on the uneven ground to rest her paws.

Stonepaw had a comically frightened expression on his face and was jumping around like a rabbit on catmint as he was chased by his older brother.

Her gaze flitted over to the Starpaws clustered together across from them and the Titanpaws huddled nearby. The cold didn't seem to

make them any less rude or judgemental, and she scowled when she saw Swanpaw using a paw to point at her and giggle to her posse.

The Titanpaws were sneering at the two littler Granite brothers and snickering, making crass remarks and throwing insults at them as they roughhoused. Slatepaw and Stonepaw either didn't hear them or didn't care as they showed no signs of being affected at all.

She caught sight of Swanpaw batting her eyes at the Titanpaws and their lovesick smirks and gagged internally. Goslingpaw stole a glance at Depthpaw and Softpaw, who were both immersed in conversation slightly further away deeper in the cave, their heads bent low as their voice came out as hushed whispers only each other could hear.

The two were also under the careful watch of Thornslash and Chanterellestreak, who both exchanged murderous death glares at each other once in a while, as if they were warning each other to stay away from their apprentice and son respectively.

At least they were smart enough to stay far away.

She huffed and ignored the Titanpaws and Starpaws as they started commenting about how 'out of place' she was among BlazeClan, and continued to watch the Granite brothers fool around as Stonepaw pounced onto Slatepaw and the two started wrestling.

Until she heard loud shouting coming from deeper in the cave where she knew Cottonsong was nested.

She pricked her ears and turned her head in that direction curiously, and could distinctly hear Stormslash and Cottonsong screaming angrily at each other.

The other apprentices seemed not to hear, but she and the two younger Granite brothers seemed to have heard the arguing as well. Goslingpaw immediately got to her paws to investigate, her curiosity winning the war with ignorance in her head.

The two gray furred brothers got to their paws as well and scrambled after her, ignoring the jeering remarks of, "*Oh look, the*

three little losers are going to go cry to their mentors how we bullied them!" Coming from both the Titanpaws and Starpaws.

Quickly weaving their way through the Claws and Shines sitting in small groups around the enclosed space, the three apprentices found the area at the back of the cave that was being used as a temporary nursery and crouched behind a huge rock so they wouldn't be seen.

Stormslash, the brown-ticked pseudo-tabby tom was standing over the white she-cat, copper eyes glinting with hate and anger as he glared at the protective queen curling her body around the four tiny kits.

Cottonsong herself glared back at him, green eyes slitted and burning with the embers of fury.

"*I REFUSE to accept that those little rats have MY blood! You must've had an affair, there's no way those tom-kits can be as weak as that stupid rat of a daughter!*" Snarled Stormslash, lashing his tail furiously.

"*THEY'RE JUST KITS! How can you be so heartless towards them?! They're only a few days old!*" Cottonsong snapped back, her hackles raising.

"*Tch, who cares if they're a few days old?! Do you know how bad I'll look if my kits are as much of a failure as their mother?! Depthpaw could walk when he was a week old, those spineless lizards look like they'll only walk when they're five weeks old!*" Stormslash screeched back, and raised a paw with unsheathed claws.

The four kittens' mews grew shrill with panic once they detected something horrible was about to happen, and Cottonsong instinctively curled herself around them tighter to intercept the blow their father delivered to strike them instead.

The three apprentices gasped as rivulets of scarlet blood trickled down her face where his claws had struck the white queen, and she glared at him with a hate-filled stare.

"*Move, you useless bag of bones! I'll kill those worthless sacks of flesh if that's what it'll take to maintain my reputation!*" Hissed Stormslash, advancing towards the queen with malicious, glinting eyes.

"*No! I won't let you!*" Shouted the white-furred queen, and she slid her own claws out as defence. Stormslash snarled at her and hissed, "*Fine, have it your way. You can join those useless scraps of fur in the Forbidden Forest!*"

He raised his claws once more to strike the queen, and Goslingpaw felt something in her snap.

The wind shrieked in her ears as she ran forward, and Goslingpaw launched herself in front of the queen and kits and took the blow instead.

Sharp pain tore through her head as his claws raked through her face diagonally, and she felt something wet and warm drip down the wound. She let out an ear splitting screech, and Stormslash flinched in surprise.

The shock was replaced by anger as he saw her, and he sneered, "*Well, well, well. Isn't it the useless failure Littlepaw who thinks she can one-up her sister.*" Goslingpaw glared at him and lashed her tail furiously, standing protectively in front of Cottonsong and her kits.

"*Oh, so you think you're a tough one, eh? Looks like I'll have to get rid of you first. No cat would miss you if you vanished either way, you'll never be as important as your sister*," Stormslash growled, and once again, raised a clawed paw to strike her.

Goslingpaw expected to feel a massive weight crush her skull, but instead, an enraged caterwaul tore through the air and the three cats glanced behind the Claw to see the younger Granite brothers with both Gustfang and Azuregale standing there, their forms outlined by the never-ending landscape of white outside the cave.

Stormslash's form seemed to shrink and deflate upon seeing the clan deputy behind him, and he quickly sheathed his claws and got into a submissive bow.

"*C-commander Azuregale! This isn't what it looks like!*" He gasped, copper eyes overtaken with fear as the furious clan deputy started to approach him with cold, calculated steps.

"*It isn't? Then explain to me why is it I see the blood from your mate and one of this clan's most crucial assets for our survival in this barren wasteland on your claws?*" Came the menacing snarl dragged out in a deadly whisper that seemed to be like death was speaking himself.

"*W-well, you know I can't possibly have such weak, spineless rats as my kits! This toad must've had an affair!*" Protested Stormslash, gesturing wildly between Cottonsong and his kits.

A hiss of fury that erupted from the white striped tom silenced him immediately and he shut his jaws instantly. "*That does not excuse your desire of killing them before they've had a chance to become apprentices,"* he growled.

The silver tomcat then narrowed his eyes critically, before he added in a voice that had dropped to a dangerously quiet whisper, "*This matter requires a certain tact it seems you have yet to grasp. I am certainly disappointed with how this turned out. We will speak more in a more private area*."

With a lash of his tail, he gestured for Stormslash to follow him, and the pseudo-tabby tom slunk away behind him, his head hung down low in shame and tail quivering like a rattle in absolute fear.

Azuregale shot a small glance of worry at his foster daughter before turning his head, a silent message asking her to take care of herself and handle the distraught mother.

When he was out of sight, Gustfang and his younger sons quickly approached them and Gustfang, with all the grace of a chainsmoking grizzly bear, asked Cottonsong gruffly, "*You okay, Shine?*"

Cottonsong exhaled a trembling, ragged breath and nodded, her kits mewling loudly in a mix of confusion and fear at the new scents that they detected.

"*Move your tail. Let the healer trainee see if your kits are okay or not*," he ordered, and Cottonsong, though hesitantly, complied and whisked her bushy tail away.

The cream and brown she-cat shook away her remaining shock, and quickly nosed each kit to ensure they were alright. They were, much to her relief.

Slatepaw and Stonepaw hesitantly approached, and the older Granite brother opened his mouth to ask something only to be silenced with a hiss from his father. "*Give the Shine space,*" growled the hefty tom with a squinty glare.

Suddenly, Cottonsong choked out what sounded like a mix between a sob and a laugh as she put her head on her paws.

"*I-I thought he was my saviour... he assured me he'd love the kits no matter how they looked or what gender they were. He said all those things to me... they were sweet nothings, all of them.*"

The distraught queen sighed and buried her face in her paws as her back legs kicked out slightly, dislodging the kittens from her belly.

They let out squeaks of protest and tried squirming closer to her belly, tiny mewls echoing out in the small corner. Gustfang sighed. "*Stormslash is a liar, Shine. Not all toms are as kind or steadfast as Azuregale or Beechwhisker. You just so happened to be unfortunate and got the one at bottom of the barrel.*"

Cottonsong gave a bitter laugh. "*I already knew long ago. He threatened to replace me with Minkstripe many times before I was pregnant because I hadn't shown signs of getting kits. And yet I still had hope for him."*

Goslingpaw quietly began to groom the white-pelted queen, trying to comfort her. The two brothers hesitated before they looked at their stocky father.

He looked at them, and sternly muttered, "*You two better watch what you say and what you do. Don't distress her or her kittens any further, you hear me?*"

They nodded, and nestled beside Goslingpaw to try and comfort the poor she-cat. Cottonsong lifted her head up, and glanced wearily at Gustfang with dull eyes.

"*Tell me, Gustfang. Why did I fall so hard for such a horrid tom? Why can't I let him go even though he clearly does not share my feelings? I know he isn't the best and I know he will never be a good father, but why can't I just let him leave my grasp?*"

Gustfang was silent for a moment, and out the corner of her eye Goslingpaw could see a troubled look in his eyes bordering with clear sadness for the grieving she-cat.

His answer was short and simple, yet answered nothing asked, proving that he himself questioned BlazeClan's harsh rules too more than he should, yet did nothing to defy them.

"*I don't know.*"

Chapter 7: Secrets Within The Sky

That night, as Goslingpaw slept, nestled together with her foster mother and both the Granite brothers and Azuregale asleep nearby on the uncomfortably icy cold stone floor, she once again found herself in the vast, misty valley she'd found her birth father in when she entered dreamland.

Rippling Leaf's familiar cheery whistle sang out once again, and Goslingpaw heard his lovely rhythmic wingbeats pumping from somewhere above her.

She glanced up, amber eyes scanning the bright blue sky that seemed to be speckled with brightly glittering stars, trying to catch a glimpse of the cat she'd wanted to see all her life.

A flash of white suddenly shot past, and Goslingpaw's eyes lit up with joy when the figure suddenly swirled around the air and appeared hovering in the air before her, the mackerel tom's majestic emerald-tipped wings pumping as his feathers caught the glint of the glimmering sun rising behind them.

"*Dad!*" She cheered in excitement as her father landed on the ground, his warm eyes pools of liquid gold as he smiled as her gently.

She started to run towards her father, but a searing pain on the bumps that had sprouted on her back sent her halting almost immediately and she fell to the ground.

"*Oh, my darling*." His soft voice was like music to her ears, and his gold eyes softened with pain and love as he approached, sweet scent curling around her like a wreath of flowers.

The brown and cream Littlepaw breathed out a sigh of relief through closed eyes as his soft, silky tail curled under her chin.

A paw gently lifted her chin up and eyes of leaf green met slits of liquid gold. Her father's gaze was solemn, and when he spoke, she felt a shiver of panic slip through her spine.

"*My dear little hatchling, there has been something I have kept hidden from all of BlazeClan.*"

Goslingpaw's eyes went wide at his words. The mackerel tom gazed at her quietly, before asking, "*Have you seen another spirit cat aside from me before?*"

Goslingpaw gazed at him dumbly for a minute, trying to process the question. She then shook her head firmly. Her birth father was the only spirit she'd ever seen.

His golden eyes glimmered gently, and he sighed. "*I thought so. Little hatchling, you don't just walk under SpiritClan's watch. You tread under different stars too.*"

The cream and brown she-cat stared up at Rippling Leaf in shock, unable to fully grasp what she had just heard. "*I-what?*"

A pained smile curled across her father's face. "*There's no SpiritClan ghost that has wings. I was never a Denfolk pet, neither was I a BlazeClan warrior.*"

Goslingpaw said nothing, eyes wide with absolute disbelief at what she'd just heard from the spirit before her.

"*T-then... what are you? If I'm not within the Crown Spirits, where am I?*"

Her voice grew more frenzied with each word, and her father stared at her with pity in his gaze before answering quietly, "*You are within the borders of the Realm Of Shining Suns. This is the resting place where cryptids like I go to when our time is over.*"

He sighed. "*Goslingpaw. Look at me.*" Once again, green met gold in a state full of confusion and hurt. "*Why didn't you tell me?*" She whispered.

"*Because it wasn't the right time. I wanted to wait until your wings are*

due to grow. And it looks like they are about to any time soon as of now." Came his reply.

This caught her attention. "*W-wings?*" She repeated, aghast. He nodded, and answered, "*Those bumps on your back are your wings developing. They'll burst through the bumps when the right time comes*."

He cocked his head slightly, as if he were listening to some unseen force, before adding, "*You are not a pure-blooded Valley Cat like me. If you were, you would've been born with your wings already*."

"*Wait... a valley cat? T-they're real?*" Goslingpaw whispered, eyes wide in disbelief.

Her father nodded, before stretching his wings wide. That was when Goslingpaw finally got a good look at her father's wingspan, and she recoiled at how large his wings actually were up close.

Upon glancing a little closer, she could see patterns on the feathers resembling that of a tawny owl's, darker brown streaks shooting through the base of cream and white.

Bright green swirls darted and wove their way through the streaks, glimmering with thin gold and white veils. Goslingpaw stumbled back.

"*So.. the legends were true? Valley Cats.. the winged cats.. are real..?*" She whispered. Rippling Leaf sighed and closed his wings around his daughter, pulling her in for a hug.

"*I'm sorry I kept this hidden from you for so long. This was a mistake on my part. But great power should not be given to one that is untrustworthy and unworthy of the sacred Valley Cats mark,*" her father mewed gently, as they locked gazes once again.

"*So... you can manipulate plant magic too?*" The Littlepaw asked, standing up once more.

"*Yes. I always could.*" The markings near the mackerel tabby's eyes flashed, and from the ground, blooming flowers begin to sprout, buds opening to reveal the gorgeous petals within.

"*With great power comes great responsibility, my little one*." His eyes flickered. "*This is a matter your clan certainly has a long way to come before they can grasp it.*"

Goslingpaw felt a small wave of indignation wash over her. "*But Aldertrail is responsible too! Azuregale, Chanterellestreak and Gustfang are all responsible!*"

"*But they are not the one in the prophecy*." Came the quiet reply. "*Your clan has quite the number of utter fools in there. BlazeClan's code has blinded them into believing that looks and gender are all that matter. This was why the Gods of the Realm of Shining Suns chose you and not Swanpaw*."

Goslingpaw's eyes went wide and she felt like someone had drenched her in the iciest waters in the land. "*So.. I'm the prophecy cat, this whole time? It wasn't Swanpaw?*"

The larger tom before her nodded. "*But- why? I'm just a lowly Littlepaw, I can't accomplish all this!*" She gasped, looking up at her father in a mixture of fear and confusion.

"*Your sister possesses a lack of intelligence, rational thinking and a tactical mind, all of which are qualities you have. Why do you think the Gods would choose someone like you over the sheer disappointment of a daughter she's become to me?*"

The hurt in his voice was clear; he'd once loved Swanpaw dearly until Dovetail's influence turned her into the monster she was today.

"*Oh, father...*" she whispered as she lifted her head up to touch noses with him.

He leaned into the touch, and sighed. "*When your mother gave birth to you and your sister, I chose to reveal my bloodline to her when you both were apprentices. I wanted to see how she'd raise you both first*."

Embers of hurt and anger glimmered deep in his gaze. "*Looking back, I'm thankful I'd died instead. She's no longer that lovely she-cat I once loved. She's transformed into a monster who only cares about her*

desires and favours one kit over the other. Your mother will stop at nothing to get what she wants; you best be on guard, my love."

Goslingpaw nodded briefly, nestling her head into her father's soft fur. "*I will.*" She hesitated before asking her next question, but after a moment she did anyway. "*When.. when will my wings grow in?*"

Her father draped his own wing over her, the soft feathers caressing her frame and bathing her in his warm scent.

"*The time will come, dearest little hatchling. They will grow when the time is right.*" Goslingpaw blinked, and was only faintly aware of the valley around her fading away.

From the corner of her eye, Goslingpaw could see two figures hidden in the mist, one tall and skinny while the other was shorter and roughly the size of a young warrior. Both of the figures faded before she could look at them properly.

"*Dad?*" She whispered as she saw her father's form fade as well. *"I love you, Goslingpaw. Remember, with great power comes great responsibility."* His golden eyes shimmered as he gazed down at her, love and warmth swirling in those pools of liquid gold.

"I will always be there for you."

Those were the last words Goslingpaw heard before the Realm of Shining Suns faded away, and she crashed back into the endless chasm of sleep as her other dreams pulled her down into its depths.

Chapter 8: Freezing Blood

Goslingpaw wasn't even sure how long had passed since BlazeClan moved to the mountains temporarily.

It felt like moons, but in reality, according to Willowflutter, it had only been *half* a moon. ***HALF***. It felt like ages!

Things hadn't changed much at all. Cougarstar had returned back to barking out orders on a daily basis, commanding the clan and never lifting a claw despite having the thickest coat of fur in the entire clan.

Beetlescar had followed in his father's pawsteps, and Goslingpaw privately thought he'd gotten even worse than he was before.

She knew he was ambitious from the start, but now he had grown so overconfident to the point he'd began bragging what he'd do when the BlazeClan throne was his within earshot of Azuregale.

Goslingpaw recalled hearing from one of the less self-absorbed and selfish Claws (which was not much, in her opinion), a brown furred tom with medium white spotting and green eyes named Hornetsting, that Azuregale had to fight Beetlescar to take the throne.

And while Azuregale was possibly the clan's best fighter, Beetlescar was stockier and more well-built than him. That made Goslingpaw worry for her foster father more than she should.

But at the same time, Goslingpaw noticed that the royal daughter, Lichenfrost, had a few changes about her. She often noticed the royal she-cat quietly sneaking out the cave when she was supposed to be 'resting her frame' with her family to help with hunting.

Lichenfrost had grown more mellow and more mature as it seemed, and while her brother often teased and mocked the she-cats of the clan while basking in the praise the toms gave him, Lichenfrost was

more or less the quiet bystander, never stepping in to intervene unless Beetlescar hit a particularly hard nerve.

The rest of the clan was still pretty much the same; the Claws still arrogant as ever despite their foolish attempts at reckless stunts having been waned due to the dangerous terrain, the Shines still quietly obeying their mates and trying to hold their heads high and the Nettles silently slinking around the cave like shadows, doing checkups and herb patrols.

Herb patrols- it was amazing they even managed to find anything in the icy cold wasteland they were in right now. And it was a wonder how the Claws even agreed to help out. Or maybe Azuregale was just very intimidating to the clan.

The apprentice training still went on regularly albeit them all having to share the same space together. Which meant having to watch the Titanpaws spar with each other and the Starpaws trying to seduce them, especially Swanpaw who seemed to have the most luck so far.

And of course, the bullying hadn't stopped.

Goslingpaw heard them call her names behind her back; she heard them mock her for being different. She had grown used to them, but seeing as to how her sister- her own KIN, thought of her as a freak... that hurt in so many ways.

The apprentices had TRIED to be rough with her multiple times though, and for once she was thankful for the confined space in the cave because it meant Azuregale had a wider range of view and whenever the apprentices tried to pick on her, he'd be there to tell them to get back to what they were doing as he was usually in the cave when they tried to physically hit her.

Things were better with her foster family, though. Aldertrail loved her dearly and always encouraged her to go on even when times seemed tough, and Azuregale was always there to support her too.

Granted, she was a little upset he couldn't help her every time she was picked on, but she took it as an opportunity to learn to stand

up for herself. She had been spending time with Elmriver recently, and started to develop a liking for sarcasm, which helped boost her wit.

She also knew if he showed outwardly that he preferred her over all the other apprentices and ESPECIALLY her sister, he could lose his position as deputy, and Goslingpaw would rather slit her throat than see Beetlescar gloating over his victory of getting his opponent off the throne.

As of right now... she was silently sitting on a platform of smooth stone, and she silently whisked her tail around her body to try and keep warm.

Her pale eyes watched Cottonsong as she rested, while her kits started having mini fights with each other, often squeaking out their 'victories'.

Surprisingly, Mousekit, the only she-kit, had managed to win every mock battle she was in despite her tiny size, and the oldest kit, Ripplekit, always chose to sit out of every mock fight that happened, and would choose to watch the Nettles instead.

Her peace was soon interrupted though, when one of the Starpaws, Hazelpaw, trotted up to her. She narrowed her eyes suspiciously at the cream and white mackerel she-cat, and the fur on the back of her neck began to raise.

"*What is it?*" She asked in a sharp tone.

Hazelpaw scoffed and snorted, "*What is your, like, problem? I've just come to deliver a message from Azuregale. He said to meet him outside by the frozen pond, he wants to discuss something with you in private apparently*."

"*What?*" This was weird. Why would her foster father ask an arrogant Starpaw to deliver a message to her instead of tasking his mate with it or asking another Nettle to come do it?

"*He must have his reasons,*" the cream and brown Littlepaw thought to herself as she heaved herself to her paws and hesitantly followed

Hazelpaw out of the cave.

The air grew thinner and colder as they neared the entrance of the cave, and Littlepaw wasn't sure when she started to get the feeling that something was wrong in her gut.

The healers had been busy trying to figure out what was going on with the frostbitten herbs, so Aldertrail hadn't seen her slip out.

When Hazelpaw persuaded the Claw guarding the entrance to let them out, Goslingpaw knew something was amiss when she felt pairs of eyes on her back.

Upon turning around, she saw nothing, however, and dismissed it as some sort of paranoia.

"*Are you sure Azuregale wants to meet me here?*" She asked, shivering slightly in the cold as she was led to the edge of the frozen river.

"Yeah, totally. See ya, Azuregale said it's reeeeeallly important and I can't hear any word of this. Toodles!" Sang Hazelpaw as she quickly trotted away.

Goslingpaw rolled her eyes and looked at her reflection in the ice covering the frozen river.

She stared quietly at the cream and brown she staring right back at her, and a part of her wished to be normal; wished she didn't have those special marks on her face that caused her to be ostracised.

Suddenly, another figure slid into view from behind her. A cat with pure white fur and golden eyes. "*Swanpaw?*" She had barely uttered those words when her sister suddenly shoved her hard towards the frosted-over river.

The impact made when she fell on the sheet of ice was enough to make it crack, and before she knew it, the ice shattered and she plunged through the water.

"So long, you poor foolish goose!" She heard her sister yowl triumphantly before whirling around and fleeing the scene.

The cold ripped through her body tremendously, and Goslingpaw tried desperately to resurface as she gasped as the outcome of the cold shock.

Out of panic, she began to hyperventilate, and water flooded into her jaws, causing her to inhale the cold water more and more as her frenzied thrashing started to subside.

She felt as though an invisible force was dragging her down, and the cold numbed her limbs greatly, before soon rendering them immobile as she began to sink, feeling the chill deep through to her bones.

Her vision began to blur, and she started seeing black spots swimming and dancing around in her range of view.

Her hearing grew muffled, but she thought she could distinctly hear three to five voices screaming in panic, and she could barely distinguish Aldertrail almost begging some cat to go down and save her.

There was another crack, and more splinters of ice fell into the water as the larger form of Elmriver plunged into the sea of ice.

The last thing Goslingpaw saw was Elmriver's amber eyes staring at her frantically, a silent prayer for her to hang on to her life as help was coming.

Then everything went black.

Chapter 9: Life And Death

"Is she going to be okay?!"

"She will be, Commander Azuregale, please do not keep coming here to disturb her rest."

"She is one of this clan's sole means for survival and also the most precious cat to Aldertrail's eyes, you better make sure she survives or I'll tear off your pelt!"

"Azuregale! That's quite enough! You'll wake her up!"

As the void around her began to swirl back into place, all that Goslingpaw could see was the darkness that surrounded her at every angle, and all of the voices she heard that echoed through it.

All voices she could probably recognise, but couldn't place who they actually belonged to.

She could feel a horrific amount of numbness, cold and pain flowing like a river through her body, but still she couldn't move a single bit. She didn't even have the strength to will her tired eyes to open even a crack.

"*She... she really will be alright, won't she, Willowflutter?"* A female voice asked, sounding much more freaked out than the first two that had spoken.

Is that Aldertrail? A voice whispered softly in the little she-cat's subconscious. *She sounds scared...*

The world was lightening up, and Goslingpaw could begin to see tiny, ant-sized patches of colour. They looked so far away, miles away, even.

Just like the distance between the Realm of Shining Suns and the forest BlazeClan used to call home. Again, Goslingpaw tried her best to open her eyes, but found that she just simply didn't have the

strength.

"*We've tried to do what we can, but we have no way to speed up the time she'll take to wake up.*"

"*That's alright, Willowflutter. She won't feel any pain while she's asleep, I'm hoping.*"

"*That's what we Nettles are thinking.*"

Wrong. Everything is so numb. It hurts.

"We're keeping a close eye on her, so don't worry. I don't think she's moved even a single inch once since she was brought back here."

"Is that bad?"

A sigh.

"No, it isn't. It means she's taking time to regain her strength. You worry too much, Commander Azuregale. You have to believe in her, she's always been a strong lass."

"What do you expect? I'm all the way down at that Suns-blasted icy Tree-Rock hunting rabbits, only to get word that Goslingpaw went out of the cave without any older cat watching over her, so I race all the way to the frozen river to see...this."

Another weary sigh before the third female voice spoke again.

"I always worry about her and her safety due to the clan's ways. And now I'm just going to do it even more."

Azuregale and Aldertrail are worried, came that voice in her head again. *You should wake up.*

"I just don't understand how she could've ended up like this, passed out and half dead! Are you sure you saw those two horrible Starpaws trick her?"

"Of course I am," a fourth voice huffed indignantly. "*And even if I didn't, it's a bit hard to tell, now. It's been snowing nonstop since we*

arrived, so the blasted snow would've blocked most of my vision. All I recall was tracking her scent to the frozen river and the minute I saw that she fell through the ice I dashed right over to save her."

"Oh...talons and whiskers, I'm sorry, Elmriver-"

"No need to apologise , Commander. This has been a shock for all of us."

Wake up! Shrieked the voice. *You have to wake up now!*

"*I just want her to wake up soon. I... I need to hear her voice to know she's alright."*

"And you will, Aldertrail. Give the Littlepaw some time."

You've had enough time! Wake up! The splashes of colour in her vision were becoming clearer now, and soon everything became white instead of black.

"*In the meantime, us Nettles will keep an eye on her and you two go and get some rest. You've both exhausted yourself plenty, rushing to the frozen river like your fur was on fire. I promise as soon as we have an update, I'll send word. She's always been a strong, resilient one, I know she'll wake up soon enough*."

Another sigh, but the order must have been obeyed, because pawsteps were heard treading further away. *They're leaving...oh, no, they're leaving! WAKE UP! YOU HAD ENOUGH TIME TO SLEEP, WAKE UP!*

Even though it hurt, inch by inch, bit by bit, Goslingpaw forced her eyes to open. The dots dancing before her became six, then ten, then twenty, and soon morphed into shapes, the white disappearing and molding into blobs of colour.

She saw something blue, something dark red and black, and two somethings that looked silver and brown, but they were both getting too far away for her to even tell. She winced and let out a weary sigh, her eyes sliding shut again.

"*...Or maybe sooner than we thought*," the blue blur said in shock. "*She moved! Aldertrail, Commander Azuregale, come back! She's waking up!*"

"*WHAT?!*"

The two things returned in seconds, screeching to a halt just inches away from her numb, near unmoving form.

"*She made a noise. I know she did*," the blue one said quickly.

"*I heard it, too!*" Exclaimed the red and black form next to the blue one.

"*Goslingpaw?*" A hushed voice asked. "*Can you hear me? Are you awake?*"

Too tired to open her eyes again, Goslingpaw could only make little, faint noises.

"*Mmmm....*"

"*I need you to open your eyes for me, lassie*," the blue blur said urgently. "*Do you think you can do that for me?"*

It took several seconds, but Goslingpaw finally found the strength to will her eyes open again, but very little of it.

"*Come on, my dear little snow goose*," the voice belonging to the silver blur whispered encouragingly. "*You can do it. You've been asleep for so long, how can you still be tired?*"

Then, the brown and white blob whispered desperately, "*Please, dearest, I want to see my world. Please, Goslingpaw, little one...I need you to look at me*."

Goslingpaw fought with her eyes for several more seconds, but she finally got them to open at least halfway. The world around her was so blurry, but everything was recognisable at least.

The blobs soon came together as the cats she knew all her life in BlazeClan. Things were constantly wavering in and out of existence, but her exhausted eyes fell on her foster parents, and only them.

"*Aldertrail..? Azuregale..?*" She rasped, voice hoarse as her foster parents gave soft gasps of relief and joy. "*My little hatchling!*" Choked

out Aldertrail with joy as she gently nuzzled her foster daughter's cheek with her own with motherly love clear in her eyes.

A faint scent wreathed around her, and Goslingpaw could make out the shape of a familiar spirit curled around her. His dazzling green eyes glimmered, and the Titanpaw-turned-Prickle gave her a gentle smile.

"*Hazepaw..?*" She whispered weakly, and the Titanpaw just blinked, smile still on his face as the brown tom beamed down at her like a radiant ray of sunshine.

She blinked, and he was gone.

She snapped out of her trance, and stared up at her foster parents who were both gazing down at her. "*My baby. My poor baby*," murmured Aldertrail as she swiftly curled her larger form around the smaller apprentice, just like how Cottonsong always did with her kits.

Goslingpaw immediately leaned into the touch, desperate for warmth, and relaxed as some of her foster mother's body warmth seeped into her body.

"*Da- Commander Azuregale..? What happened? Why am I so.. cold?*" She mustered up the strength to choke out to the clan deputy.

His blue eyes glinted with anger. "*Your pathetic sister pushed you into the frozen river. Rest assured, little goose. She will not get away unpunished*," he growled in a grave tone.

She couldn't find the strength in her to reply, so she just nodded tiredly before sinking back into the bed of moss she was laid on.

Azuregale gave her one more concerned glance, and with a nod from Aldertrail, a silent message, he pressed his nose softly to her head before he quietly left.

Moments after he did though, Gustfang carefully treaded to the makeshift healing station with both his younger sons in tow, and Depthpaw and Softpaw close behind.

"*All four of you, don't get too excited*," he warned. "*The Littlepaw just got rescued from near death; she's in no condition to be all worked up*." The four young apprentices nodded, and quietly approached her, eyes wide with worry.

Aldertrail stared at them for a moment, before flattening her ears and giving them a warning stare that promised a thorough clawing if they dared to disturb her foster daughter any further.

Carefully, Slatepaw was the first to speak.

"*Goslingpaw? Are you okay?*" She only managed a tiny "*Mhm*.", barely even lifting her head up to face him.

"*I'm so sorry; I should've stopped Hazelpaw when I saw her trying to lure you out...*" Softpaw whimpered feebly, guilt crossing her features.

"*Don't.. blame yourself...*" Goslingpaw managed to sigh wearily, as though the sheer effort of speaking was killing her.

"*Yeah, Softpaw. Don't blame yourself,*" Depthpaw mewed. "*Azuregale said he's going to punish those two real bad. It's against the code to even attempt to kill a clanmate, so even Cougarstar can't back them up now.*"

Goslingpaw sighed again and drew herself deeper into the nest. "*Throat... hurts...*" she whispered hoarsely. Her throat didn't actually hurt, but she just didn't want to hear anything more about the situation.

"*Your throat hurts?*" Aldertrail asked softly, before turning her head to the four apprentices.

"*One of you, make yourself useful and get her some water. Soak a wad of moss in the drinking hole and come back as fast as possible. The rest of you, huddle around her to keep her warm*," she mewed, her voice full of quiet authority.

Gustfang didn't say anything, his eyes glimmering with pity for Goslingpaw as Slatepaw immediately hurried out to get some moss while the three apprentices immediately curled around the shivering Littlepaw, letting her draw in some of their body heat to keep warm.

Only a few moments passed when loud yelling was heard from deeper in the cave. Goslingpaw let out a groan and tried to bury herself deeper into both the nest and her foster mother's fur.

In response, Aldertrail rested her plumy tail on Goslingpaw's head and whispered endearments to her.

A flurry of pawsteps a short while later announced the arrival of Slatepaw and Beechwhisker, and the older tom sat down quietly beside Gustfang as his apprentice dropped the soaking moss before the Littlepaw.

Goslingpaw managed to crack open one eye before tiredly latching her jaws onto the moss to drink from it, quenching her thirst. As she drank, she listened to Aldertrail speak to Beechwhisker.

"What's the commotion out there? It's disturbing my Littlepaw more than it should."

"Apologies, Ma'am Aldertrail. But Commander Azuregale is most certainly not very pleased with the stunt the Starpaws tried to pull."

"I should think so."

"He received permission from Cougarstar to reprimand both of them, and surprisingly, her Majesty Lichenfrost is scolding them too."

"Actually?"

"Yes. Cougarstar himself and Beetlescar don't seem to care too much since it's the she-cats, but Dovetail is trying to defend her useless prophecy daughter and her friend."

The first bit was news to Goslingpaw. Lichenfrost scolding the Starpaws and helping to stand up for her? That was surprising indeed.

She also noted that Beechwhisker had addressed Lichenfrost as 'her Majesty' but not her brother Beetlescar as 'his Majesty'.

"I hope she does not succeed."

"Rest assured, Ma'am Aldertrail. Commander Azuregale is relentless towards any and every cat when it comes to punishments. I know for a fact he would've assigned guards to your Littlepaw if he was leader, although there are limited choices for him to assign as guards in this excuse of a clan."

"He would?"

"Yes. Pity Cougarstar isn't as understanding. I pray that Azuregale wins when the time comes for him and crown heir Beetlescar to decide who claims the BlazeClan throne."

A soft sigh was heard from her foster mother, and Goslingpaw managed to see her friends resting their heads on their paws, about to doze off too.

She couldn't blame them; they were busy training all morning and had rushed to see her almost right after hearing she'd been in the accident.

The last thing she heard before slipping back into the void of unconsciousness was from Aldertrail.

"*I hope he will. BlazeClan will be in shambles if the throne goes to Beetlescar instead.*"

Chapter 10: New Ally

Goslingpaw had not been let out of her mentor's sight even once after that incident. And it wasn't like she even wanted to.

The cream and brown Littlepaw had been wary of the BlazeClan cats since her near-death drowning, and especially went out her way to avoid her mother and sister.

Azuregale had not been biased or soft in punishing the two Starpaws for their actions, although Cougarstar had said to give Swanpaw a lighter punishment because she was 'the prophecy cat' and the 'star of the clan'.

Both Starpaws had been sentenced to eat last after every single cat in BlazeClan had eaten, and Hazelpaw, as double punishment for agreeing to help Swanpaw and because she wasn't part of the prophecy, had been forced to stand outside the cave in the shrieking cold winds for an hour to feel the same icy numbness that Goslingpaw had felt.

Even though her daughter was on the lower receiving end of the punishment, Dovetail still kicked up a massive fuss.

Goslingpaw knew after getting her precious little kit into trouble like that with the clan's strictest cat, Dovetail would be on her tail even more.

Aldertrail had immediately whisked her away the minute she saw Goslingpaw's delusional birth mother stomp towards the silver deputy a few days after the Littlepaw could start walking again.

Judging by Azuregale's face when he stalked past a good few moments later, she could tell he was getting angry at the Shine's incessant spoiling of her bratty daughter.

As of now, Goslingpaw was performing some leg exercises to both stretch her muscles and also ease the numbness in her limbs since

her fall. Willowflutter said that it would help ease her discomfort when walking.

Nearby, she felt the gaze of Beechwhisker trained on her back, but when she turned around to look at him, he was silently grooming himself instead.

Beechwhisker had been appointed by Azuregale to guard Goslingpaw at all times, given that she was a vital asset to the clan for their survival and since Slatepaw's mentor himself wasn't such a high ranking tom in the clan and had no big, important role to play nor jobs to do, so he accepted the role immediately.

She was startled when the tom appeared by her side all of a sudden, his sleek tail twitching every few minutes. "*Feeling better?*" He asked in his funny accent.

Goslingpaw blinked in astonishment at how he'd come over here so quietly she hadn't noticed him, before her head finally managed to comprehend what he'd asked and came up with a response.

"*Y-yes, Sir Beechwhisker*," she responded, quickly bowing her head to him as per BlazeClan tradition. He quickly raised his paw and mewed, "*No formalities with me, please. I'm just a regular BlazeClan warrior*."

Goslingpaw couldn't suppress the shudder that she felt when she heard him say 'no formalities' to her. It reminded her so much of that horrible, lecherous tom Cobrastrike.

"*It's alright*," she mentally scolded herself. "*Beechwhisker is a kind tom, not like that horrible cat with rocks for brains. I'm glad Cobrastrike's dead.*"

He sat next to her, and his gleaming eyes flashed in the darkness of the cave. "*You are very fortunate to have Azuregale on your side, you know*."

She paused her grooming and stared up at him in alarm. Had he figured out the clan deputy's secret?

He flicked an ear, and as if he read her thoughts, Beechwhisker

sighed. *"No worries, I won't tell a soul even if I'm skinned alive. Even without saying anything I could tell he favoured you more than your sister, or really any of the other apprentices."*

He twitched his tail and sighed as he slid into a resting position to face the Littlepaw at eye-level. "*I'll let slip a little secret, young one. I don't believe your sister is the prophecy cat at all*."

Goslingpaw gazed at him and sighed. "*I doubt so too*."

Beechwhisker might've been one of her best friend's mentor, but she wasn't going to trust him that quick to tell him that her sister really wasn't the cat destined to save BlazeClan.

She still was rather surprised that a Claw wouldn't believe the prophecy, of all things.

The cream mackerel tabby tom drew in a breath and sighed. *"I honestly never really believed in prophecies or the Crown Spirits to begin with. I was actually born a rogue before I came to BlazeClan.*"

The healer apprentice blinked in surprise. "*You were?*"

"*Yeah. BlazeClan's ways surprised me when I first asked to join to escape meeting the fate my parents did staying at the old abandoned shack near the outskirts of the old forest territory*."

Goslingpaw gave him a clueless stare when he mentioned the word 'shack'.

Catching her expression, Beechwhisker explained that a shack was some sort of enclosed RoadWalker den that looked run-down and dilapidated.

"They both fell into a wood-saw and got bisected when RoadWalkers came to tear the place down," he yawned in a dismissive manner.

Goslingpaw's eyes went wide. "*Oh, Beechwhisker, I'm so sorry!*"

The mackerel tom looked uncomfortable at the sympathy he was receiving and responded, "*It's fine. I never really liked them anyway, too controlling and never really even bothered to acknowledge my*

existence."

He yawned, "*Anyways, the past doesn't matter. What you should know however, is that I'm on your side.*" His eyes gleamed in the darkness of the cave. "*Azuregale has all of my support for him to be the next BlazeClan leader.*"

This felt like relief to Goslingpaw. "*So you don't support Cougarstar's ways, or his heirs?*" The cream mackerel tom looked around discreetly, then shook his head. "*No*."

He lifted his head up, glancing at the darkening sky out from the cave entrance as the first stars began to appear.

"*I would much rather have a tom that deviates from BlazeClan's atrocious rules in charge instead of one determined to drive the entire clan off into the deep end either way*."

Chapter 11: Sting Of Rejection

"So this herb over here is thyme."
"Yeah?"
"It helps to calm a cat down. Can you remember that?"

The little kit frowned and looked like he was trying to concentrate as he squinted at the leaves. "*Yes*." Goslingpaw smiled in amusement.

The brown-ticked tabby kit, Ripplekit, had shown clear interest in the works of a Nettle, and that day, he had requested to learn a bit about herbs so he could help the Nettles if they needed an extra helping paw.

Now, Goslingpaw was quietly teaching him the basics of herbs and some basic healing methods.

She had taught him how to clean a wound and how to apply cobwebs to an injury, and as of right now she has teaching him how to calm a panicking cat down.

A soft pitter-patter of pawsteps announced the arrival of the Slate and Stone twins. The two looked up, and Ripplekit squeaked out happy greetings as the two cats settled down around Goslingpaw.

"*I see you've got an apprentice now, Gos!*" Teased Stonepaw as Slatepaw carefully nosed Ripplekit's head gently.

"*You and I both know I'm too young to have an apprentice this early, you salamander head,*" she chuckled, laughing at the look of mock-hurt on her best friend's face at the insult.

Suddenly, a voice called out to the small tom-kit, and Ripplekit's ears perked up.

"*Oh, mama's calling! I'll see you later when I finish my nap, Goslingpaw!*" He chirped excitedly before scurrying off.

Goslingpaw smiled and flicked her tail after the brown tabby as he scampered away towards his mother, and the other apprentices all giggled slightly at Ripplekit's enthusiasm.

"*Awww, the little kit wants to grow up to be like our fancypaws little goose!*" Teased Slatepaw, and the cream and brown apprentice just laughed and swatted at his head, replying, "*Aw, lay off the nicknames already, you cleverclaws!*"

The small group erupted into a fit of giggles, but all three were soon interrupted by a loud, drawn out hiss coming from further ahead.

Turning their heads, they saw Azuregale glaring at Thornslash before curtly beckoning for him to follow with a sharp lash of his tail.

As the two older toms headed off in the direction of the drinking hole, curiosity began to fill the four apprentices' guts. "*Sneak mission!*" Stonepaw grinned, and quickly bounded off in the same direction before any cat could stop him.

"*Oh, for the Crown Spirits' sake- Stonepaw!*" Slatepaw hurriedly got to his paws and chased after his brother.

The she-cat apprentice looked at the two brothers before chuckling and heading off in the same direction as the twins.

When they reached the rocky entrance to the drinking hole, they saw Depthpaw crouched outside, eyes widened in shock and confusion.

Upon scenting the three arrivals, he sharply whipped his head toward them and hissed at them to be quiet.

As the four huddled outside the small cavern, they strained their ears to try and hear what Thornslash and Azuregale were saying.

"*But I love you!*" Protested Thornslash, lashing his tail in a fit of desperation. "*We'd be perfect together, Azuregale. I know we would*."

The silver tom looked like he was taking a massive effort to try and control his temper; something told the apprentices the two toms

had been having this conversation for too long.

"*And like I said many times before, I do not reciprocate your feelings. My heart belongs to another cat already,*" Azuregale hissed in annoyance.

"*Then I can be a better mate than whoever that cat is!"* Thornslash seemed even more desperate now. He pressed closer to the silver tom, and meowed, "*Please, Azuregale. Just give me a chance*."

Upon looking down, Goslingpaw noticed how embarrassed Depthpaw looked, and felt her gut wrench with pity for him.

"*I said enough!*" Azuregale spat, and swiped a paw at the other tom, sending him staggering back. "*I have told you multiple times already that I love another cat. I never loved you, I only saw you as a friend.*"

He narrowed his blue eyes before shaking his head and sighing before he continued, "*You will never be able to replace the she-cat I love. No one can.*"

This seemed to have triggered a nerve in Thornslash, because the russet tom began to bristle. Tail lashing furiously, he glanced back up at the clan deputy with eyes ablaze.

"*You've been leading me on all these moons, Azuregale. And now you tell me you've replaced me with an insolent Shine?! Even after Seedlingheart died I tried to be there for you, and you replaced me?!*" He accused, and Azuregale bristled.

"*Who is it?! Is she carrying any of your kits?! I'll get her out of the picture if I have to!*" Thornslash was cut off when Azuregale lunged at him and swung a mighty paw at him, his pitch black claws fully unsheathed.

Goslingpaw felt Depthpaw tense and the Granite brothers flinch as a shriek of pain emitted from Thornslash's maw, and crimson blood oozed from the massive slash on his face.

"*You are delusional, Thornslash. Who I love is none of your business and who I take as a mate is none of your Crown Spirits-forsaken concern!*" Bellowed Azuregale.

Thornslash cowered back as Azuregale stood towering over him, hackles raised and claws unsheathed and dripping with blood.

"*I will say this for the last and final time*," snarled Azuregale. *"I don't love you. I never loved you and I never will love you. If you try to cause harm to another cat because of this, I will not hesitate to kill you without a second thought."*

Azuregale was fuming by now; Goslingpaw had never thought she'd be scared of her foster father until this very moment. She snapped back to attention as her foster father continued to speak.

"*Even if I didn't have a mate already, I refuse to take on a cat who abandoned his own mate after she went through the sheer agony of giving birth to his kit as my partner for life.*"

Depthpaw barely even seemed to be affected by what the apprentices were hearing right now; Goslingpaw suspected he knew of his mother's abandonment long ago.

With a lash of his tail, Azuregale gestured to the exit of the cavern. "*Get out. We will not speak of this again*," he growled, and with a shaking gulp Thornslash nodded and whispered meekly, "*Yes Commander Azuregale.*"

The four apprentices hurriedly fled behind a large rock as Thornslash stumbled out the cavern and away from the place where his humiliation had taken place.

Depthpaw shook his head and sighed as Azuregale stormed out of the cavern and stalked off, presumably to find Aldertrail or go hunting.

"I knew this would happen," he groaned. *"Dad's been head-over-claws for Azuregale forever. And he's taking that obsession to a whole new level."*

For once, Goslingpaw didn't know what to say. She now remembered with a shudder how Thornslash kept trying to shoulder other cats aside so he could spend time only with Azuregale, Aldertrail-her mentor and his secret mate- included.

There was some jealousy between him and the cats Azuregale was particularly close to as well, and his son Depthpaw was unfortunately caught up in everything too. She and the Granite brothers exchanged worried looks before they started to try and comfort the defeated Titanpaw.

Depthpaw's picture perfect life had been a cover to hide the troubles brewing within; now Goslingpaw knew even behind the most dense yet kindly toms of BlazeClan's complicated history hid the darkest secrets within.

Chapter 12: Trinity Of Triplets

A thin breeze blew into the cavern as Goslingpaw perched atop a flat lip of stone, her pale eyes scanning her surroundings as her tail twitched against the cold stone ground.

She wouldn't admit it, but the sight of the barren stone walls was starting to get to her.

A lot.

She remembered hearing Vinespring worrying about the conditions BlazeClan was in to Berrytrail, saying that there was a possibility that the stone walls could contain something called "spark-shards"that could apparently do something called stone stunning.

Whatever that meant, she didn't want to find out. But she was startled from her thoughts when a cold pelt brushed against hers.

Looking up, she was relieved to see it was just Depthpaw. "*Hi*," he mewed with a warm smile. His russet fur was plastered against his body, and small snowflakes wove their ways into the delicate hairs of his pelt.

He had become a more welcome guest to her these passing moons, both sharing a mutual understanding with one another while living in the harsh winter wasteland.

"*Hi*," she purred back, and watched as he tried to sit down beside her with as much grace as possible. "*What're you up to? I thought the Titanpaws had hunting practice today?*"

The russet tom gave a simple shrug of his shoulders before answering, "*We did. I was hunting by the narrow cleft where the rabbits burrow, and somehow, someway, I managed to snag two at once*."

There was no false humility or hint of pride in his voice; just pure modesty. "*Nightscar said I did well and since I had finished the task so*

quick, I would get to rest until all the Titanpaws' waited assessment tonight."

Goslingpaw chuckled. "*Well, you could always go hang out with the Starpaws. I think a couple of them really seem to fancy you*," she meowed through a strained smile.

"*If by 'a couple of them' you mean your dirt-brained sister I think I'll pass*," Depthpaw replied with a shudder. "*It's really terrifying how she's always all over about every Titanpaw like a dog over a bone*."

Goslingpaw gave a snort, though deep down she was relieved. "*Then what do you want to do now?*" She queried. "*Aldertrail's catching some sleep right now so I'm available.*"

Depthpaw cocked his head slightly. "*Can we go to the Prickles and hear some legends? I'd love to hear a story about the Valley Cats*," he mewed. "*You know about the Valley Cats?*" She mewed in surprise.

The Titanpaw shrugged and responded, "*Yeah. Dad told me some stories about them but the tales he told only surrounded toms and their brave deeds. I really want to hear something more interesting than a tom conquering an evil enemy*."

Goslingpaw rolled her eyes. "*Typical. Let's go,*" she mewed, standing up carefully and beckoning him to follow her with a lash of her tail.

The two walked over to the small dip in the ground that the Prickles used as a nesting ground, and immediately all three of the she-cats turned to look at them.

"*Goslingpaw! Depthpaw! Greetings,*" Chervilsky purred with her radiant smile. "*What do you two want today?*"

"*Can we hear a story?*" Depthpaw asked, his tail wagging slightly in anticipation. "*Of course. Which tales do you want to hear?*" Cloudflower twitched her ear in amusement.

"*The Valley Cats!*" Came the enthusiastic reply, and all three Prickles burst into soft chuckling. "*Of course,*" purred Poppystreak.

"*Which particular Valley Cats, though? The Northern Kingdoms home*

home to the entire population of the mythical heroes and villains. It's impossible to tell the story of a unique one, and I'm sure you two heard many different stories," Cloudflower mewed.

Depthpaw faltered for a moment, before turning to the cream and brown Littlepaw with a lost look in his eyes. Quietly, Goslingpaw sifted through the names in her mind, filtering out those she was sure Depthpaw had heard already until her mind came to a trio of cats.

"*Can we hear the story Trinity Of Triplets?*" She asked, her eyes lighting up. "*Ah! The triplets Dizzyflash, Deepwave and Drizzledaze! A classic*," laughed Poppystreak.

The two apprentices settled together, tails over each other's backs as the three Prickles shifted to more comfortable positions and started the tale. The one who started off was Chervilsky.

"*Our story began one stormy night on the coastal territory of the Kin Of The Restless Veil. A trio of Solar and Kerauno hybrid triplets had just been born.*

This was seen as a blessing, due to tribal belief that triplets are seen as prosperity and fortune.

They weren't prepared for the curse that had befallen the trio that very night. Despite being triplets, and being completely identical in appearance, all three cats were completely different in personality."

Cloudflower shifted as Chervilsky turned to her, and with a graceful flick of her tail she continued off where her friend had cut off.

"Drizzledaze was the ambitious one. He was very strong and brave, and would come to be a very feared opponent in battle, As a mark of his ambitious self, he dyed his feathers red, orange and yellow.

Deepwave was the smart and regal one. She was always quick to respond to anything, and could come up with ideas faster than lightning. She was elegant and graceful, so as a symbol of those elements she dyed her feathers pink and purple.

Dizzyflash was the oddball out of the litter. They were very adventurous

and too bold for their own good. Dizzyflash was ditzy and silly, but they were a solid fighter though they were nowhere as good as their brother. They dyed their feathers blue and green as a representation of nature."

Poppystreak resumed when Cloudflower paused. Goslingpaw found it hypnotic how the three Prickles could tell what each other wanted to say; perhaps they had been doing this for longer than she thought.

"The Kin had misinterpreted what they thought was a sign of blessing from the spirits that night when the storm left a symbol on only Drizzledaze's head while his siblings had to wait a few moons more for theirs.

They had thought it meant Drizzledaze would grow to be a protector of the tribe, but instead it had meant that an enchantment had been cast upon the oldest triplet, and the enchantment was bad.

Trouble started brewing when Drizzledaze's ambition hit the better of him. Nothing was ever enough for him. He wanted to win at everything; losing was all but an impossible thought to him.

He wanted to become a leader, and his selfishness drove him to the desire to take over the entire Northern Kingdom. This ambition drove him to become brutal and insane, to the point Drizzledaze got as bold as to extend the Kin ' s territory further into the other tribes'."

Chervilsky breathed out a sigh.

"Drizzledaze grew distant from his siblings as the days passed and they became warriors. Drizzledaze progressed faster than his siblings, and the praise got to his head.

He started to think he had been born into the wrong litter, for he thought he was strong. His siblings were weak.

All Deepwave and Dizzyflash seemed to care about was living their lives to the fullest. Oh yes, Deepwave had found herself a mate and Dizzyflash had helped to win a battle against one of the tribes over territory and prey disputes.

But all they cared about was the Oath Of The Dragons and the blessings

of peace. It drove Drizzledaze mad that his kin were blind to see the power they could grasp if they were adventurous and ambitious enough ."

Goslingpaw gaped at the three Prickles before her, before she heard Depthpaw asked tentatively, "*Then what happened next to them all?*"

Cloudflower shook her head and breathed out a steady sigh. *"It happened just before what they call the Night Of Rose Rain. A beautiful black she-cat from a neighbouring tribe that Drizzledaze found himself enamoured with chose Dizzyflash over him.*

He had strutted out to her in an arranged meeting by their borders, confident that Izula, the she-cat, would love him right back. After all, he was strong and brave, what she-cat wouldn't want that?

What a shock he had received that night when he saw his brother preening his crush, whispering endearments to her!

Of course Dizzyflash had known nothing about his brother's crush on Izula; Drizzledaze had never thought of telling his siblings as he deemed them too inferior."

Goslingpaw tipped her head. "*So they had a crush on the same cat at the same time?*" Chervilsky laughed. "*Not exactly*," she replied.

"See, during their apprenticeship, while Drizzledaze was arrogant and talked down on any other apprentices, Dizzyflash was kind and supportive. Their ditzy charm drew Izula in, and they had confessed to each other, agreeing to be mates when they got older.

Of course Drizzledaze knew nothing about this, and that night as he saw his brother with the one cat he loved, his mind was overshadowed with rage and hate.

Drizzledaze began to leave rotting prey carcasses on the territory of both the tribe Izula came from, the Guild Of Freedom, and his own, being careful to mask his scent when doing so.

Accusations went flying during the Gathering Of The Tribes, and soon there was a full-blown war. And of course, during this, Drizzledaze was sure to try and kill as many Guild cats as he could while leaving his own

tribe mates to suffer."

Goslingpaw felt Depthpaw quivering with anticipation next to her. "*Then.. what happened?*" He whispered.

"The final battle happened on a night with conditions like the day the triplets were born after three relentless moons. The battle had grown intense and cats were falling like prey left and right.

The other two tribes had taken sides, and things had gotten so bad that the mate of one of the Kin ' s secondary leaders had been killed blindly by her own friend from the Guild.

As for Dizzyflash, they were stuck with a choice to make as their own brother forced Izula to be his hostage. That night as the lightning crackled above, Drizzledaze revealed he had been behind everything, and he swore he would not stop until the valley was his.

There was absolutely no amount of reasoning that could make him back down . He had gone so far, so there was no reason for him to stop and back down now ."

Poppystreak stretched her maw open in a yawn before she continued. "*Drizzledaze then made a deal. He said he would stop the war under the conditions that control of the Northern Kingdom was given entirely to him and Izula would be his mate instead.*

While he was speaking, Deepwave lunged over and tried to take him down, but instead he was the one who struck the final blow, ending the life of his sister who had done nothing wrong to him.

With their dearest sister dead, their mate held hostage and the fate of the valley in the claws of both them and their brother, Dizzyflash finally struck.

Whatever remained of the triplets grappled as the lightning flashed, but Dizzyflash was the one who struck the fatal blow to their brother's throat and shoved him into the sea, where the waves swallowed him whole, ending his reign of tyranny once and for all."

Goslingpaw and Depthpaw made soft sounds of wonder as the Prickle ended the tale. "*That was amazing,*" whispered Depthpaw.

"Thank you so much for telling us the story."

"*It's no problem, young'un. But don't go thinking those stories are real, y'hear?*" Cloudflower twitched her ragged ear.

"*It does not do any good to believe in things you cannot see, touch, or feel. It is a waste of time unless you believe. But do they say what? Believe in what? No. That's how you get into trouble. In this barren wasteland, staying alive—that's what counts*."

But Goslingpaw knew that the Valley Cats were real. And as she heard the soft hypnotic voices drawing her into their grasp that night, feeling the bumps on her back that would soon burst into wings, she knew that the legends were all too real.

Chapter 13: No Secrets To Share

"*Stag tongues and viper spit!*" The curse rung out through the small healing station, scalding the still air, and the cream and brown Littlepaw instinctively looked up.

The sight that greeted her was an angry Elmriver pacing around and a nervous-looking Aldertrail and Berrytrail sitting nearby counting the number of herbs remaining on the rocky shelves.

She cocked her head furiously and quickly trotted up to the three healers before asking curiously, "*Whatever's the matter? Did something happen?*"

Elmriver didn't even glance at her as she snarled furiously, "*I'm going to strangle those insolent Titanpaws the first chance I get, then I'll poison their mentors too*."

Aldertrail sighed and whisked her foster daughter over to her gently with her tail before leaning over and muttering, "*Some of the Titanpaws decided it would be funny to use almost the entire herb storage to fool around and now our stocks are dangerously low*."

Her eyes went wide with horror. "*What?!*" Her mentor nodded and sighed. "*As of right now Beechwhisker and the two Granite brothers are with Dawnheart and Lotusheart out on the Eastern side of the territory to scavenge for more*."

"*What about Willowflutter, Vinespring and Stempetal?*" Goslingpaw asked curiously with a tilt of her head to the left. "*They're searching around in the Western border with Chanterellestreak and Softpaw.*"

Softpaw! Goslingpaw had to hold herself from gasping. *She's hardly ready to face the dangers of the outside world yet!*

The two Granite brothers were tough and plucky, but Softpaw had

never been allowed out of BlazeClan's confines a day of her life at all as part of being a Starpaw. How could she handle the sheer cold of the icy tundra outside?

The same thought must've flashed across her mentor's mind, because she gently draped her tail over her apprentice's back as a form of comfort.

"*Softpaw will be okay. Moons have passed; we've all grown older and stronger*," she reassured. Goslingpaw blinked up at the beautiful face of her adoptive mother, amber green eyes meeting pools of enchanting leaf-green.

Berrytrail suddenly turned her head and perked up her ears before gasping and quickly getting to her paws. "*Commander Azuregale of BlazeClan*," she greeted, and Elmriver paused her pacing to do the same albeit a bit less gracefully.

Aldertrail blinked as the silver tom came into view, celestial blue eyes shining like stars. She got to her paws and bowed as well, so Goslingpaw tried her best to copy the position her older mentor was in.

"*At ease, Nettles*." His calming voice reverberated through the cave walls, and Goslingpaw gazed into his eyes as the other Nettles got to their paws. "*I heard that the Titanpaws were meddling with your herbs again?*"

Goslingpaw could see that Elmriver was making a massive effort to control herself from ranting and spewing vile words out in front of the clan deputy.

"*Yes, Commander,*" muttered the massive she-cat after some time. He flicked an ear and sighed.

"*Just as I suspected. You can relax, Elmriver. I've already issued warnings and gave all of the Titanpaws responsible for the mess a grave punishment. Rest assured this shall not happen again*."

He turned to Aldertrail, before he began once more, "*I hope I can be of assistance to help you forage for herbs with your apprentice during*

these trying times."

Aldertrail blinked in surprise, before dipping her head politely and mewing softly, "*That is very kind of you, Commander. All the help we can get is very much appreciated*."

Azuregale nodded. Aldertrail got to her paws and glanced back at Berrytrail and Elmriver, who both assured her they would be fine sorting the remaining herbs on their own.

Then, with a lash of her tail, Aldertrail beckoned her apprentice over and the three set off into the icy cold of the mountains.
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Nothing much had been found after what felt like forever of searching.

Goslingpaw grimaced as she used her paw to push aside a mound of slushy snow only to uncover what looked like the bone or tooth of a long dead carcass.

She wrinkled her nose and shoved the snow back into place before glancing up. Aldertrail was further away, digging through the slush-like snow with surprising determination.

Azuregale was in the opposite direction, kicking at the larger snow mounds and swiping away the piddly bits with a paw. When he had no luck with one mound, he resorted to clawing at another to hopefully unearth something.

Silently, she thought of an idea, but she severely hoped that no one was watching her at all.

Looking around once again, Goslingpaw closed her eyes and concentrated, feeling the white-hot fire build up behind her eyes as her plant manipulation magic began to do its work.

"*Cold-cough is an issue up here in the mountains, so we'll need plenty of catmint... please work, I'm begging you...*" As she concentrated, the fire behind her eyes grew hotter and hotter until the fiery sensation

finally subsided.

"*Aaah*," she sighed with relief as she saw the tall, leafy, and delicious-smelling plant. The sight of the clusters of grey-green leaves and hairy stems caused her anxiety to ease up, and she reached out a paw to pull them up.

"*G-Goslingpaw?*"

Hearing her name being called out caused her blood to run cold and she froze. She didn't dare to turn her head, but still, she forced herself to turn around.

Aldertrail and Azuregale were standing there, staring at her. Two pairs of eyes, one and enchanting green and the other a celestial blue set, stared directly into her own amber-green ones, shock and confusion swirling around.

"*A-Azuregale, Aldertrail! T-this isn't what it looks like!*" She gasped, panic lacing her tone. Would they tell the clan? What would happen to her if that happened?

Aldertrail looked like she wanted to speak, but it was Azuregale who stepped forth and started first. The shriveled, frostbitten herbs he'd found fell to the ground as he opened his jaws.

"*How long?*" He asked. Goslingpaw stepped back nervously. "*How long what?*" The silver tom blinked and asked tersely, "*How long have you been keeping this from us? From me?*"

Aldertrail lashed her tail worriedly and interrupted before Goslingpaw could say anything. "*Pardon me for interrupting, but I.. I feel it would be better if we went to a more closed space to have this conversation. We never know who else is out there*."

Azuregale gave her a look, before quietly nodding. Looking down at his foster daughter, he ordered, "*Pick the catmint and follow us, young molly*."

Goslingpaw swallowed. Azuregale rarely called her young molly unless he was genuinely displeased with her, and his tone suggested that if she argued back she'd regret it.

Quickly, Goslingpaw picked off all the clumps of catmint and stored them in her jaws as she and both her foster parents set off in search of a more private area.

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A carved in hollow den under a massive tree seemed to be the ideal spot though the musky odour inside was not exactly the cream and brown Littlepaw's favourite smell.

"*Now, young molly*," Azuregale began, his sharp eyes flicking to her. "*Explain. Now*."

Goslingpaw swallowed. She couldn't lie to her foster parents and the BlazeClan deputy, of all things! So she obediently told Aldertrail and Azuregale every single thing, not missing the details.

She started from when her powers first manifested to the events that just happened and the visits she had with her father Rippling Leaf.

And throughout all this, her foster parents just kept quiet. It bothered her, but she was afraid to say it.

When she was done, silence hung in the still air of the den. Then, Aldertrail began to speak softly. "*My dear, you should've told us*."

Goslingpaw shuffled closer to herself and mumbled, "*I'm sorry, I was afraid you wouldn't accept me.*" "*Nonsense!*" Boomed Azuregale. He reached a paw over and lifted up the cream and brown Littlepaw's chin with a claw.

"*My little gosling, it doesn't matter what powers you have, whether you have magic or not or anything. We'll still love you the way you are*," he reassured.

We. He referred to him and Aldertrail as we. He must really love her, Goslingpaw thought.

"*Who else knows?*" Aldertrail questioned. "*Softpaw, Stonepaw, Slatepaw and the Prickles.*" Azuregale twitched his ears and sighed.

"*They are trustworthy, seeing that none of them have started nattering about it aloud yet.*"

"*I'm just a bit disappointed you didn't tell us first; do you not trust us?*" Goslingpaw felt small at this. "*I do, but I was afraid you'd tell the clan.*"

Aldertrail whisked her soft tail around Goslingpaw and pulled her closer into a motherly embrace. "*You can tell us anything, you realise that?*"

"*Mmm,*" came the muffled reply as Goslingpaw nestled deeper into her foster mother's soft brown fur.

"*So.. you've met Blazeclaw- I mean, Rippling Leaf?*" She blinked up into the silvery face of her foster father. "*Yes.*" The clan deputy blinked, and shuffled his paws slightly.

"*Is he upset at us?*" Her eyes went wide immediately. "*No, he's not! I promise you, he isn't and never will be mad at you for raising me,*" Goslingpaw mewed.

Those alluring celestial blue eyes twinkled with an unknown emotion, then Azuregale shuffled over and curled his tail about both Goslingpaw and Aldertrail, and the foster family rested against each other.

"You won't tell a soul, Da?"

"No. Of course not. Some things are better left revealed on their own."

Chapter 14: Reaper Lurking

A slight hiss erupted from Talonsnarl as Goslingpaw applied a little bit of pressure to the scrape on his shoulder while washing the injury with soaked moss.

"*Almost finished, Sir Claw*," she muttered through a stick swathed in cobwebs in her jaws, and Talonsnarl sighed as she applied the cobwebs as fast as she could without putting more pressure.

"*What happened?*" The blue tabby tom looked down at her with hazel eyes and snorted, "*Why so curious? Won't a little she-cat like you be afraid of the dangers us big, bad Claws go through?*"

Goslingpaw shrugged and let his gaze evenly. "*Considering I have to deal with the horrors of looking after the Titanpaws who do stupid things on a daily basis, I think I can handle it.*"

"*Bold words*," chuckled Talonsnarl. "*Pity you ain't as pretty as your mouth is fast.*" Goslingpaw rolled her eyes and responded flatly, "*Being a Starpaw and later a Shine sounds boring.*"

Talonsnarl laughed, though quite frankly Goslingpaw didn't quite see what was so funny. "*Small one, being a Shine is the best rank a she-cat can get. I'm surprised you're content with being a Nettle.*"

She stubbornly flattened her ears and purposely put pressure on the wound, earning a hiss of shock from the tom. "*Alright alright, I'll tell you. You won't tell anyone else, of course*," he chuckled.

Goslingpaw didn't quite like the way he said those words, nor did she like the weird glimmer in his eye went he said it, but she held her tongue instead of expressing it out loud.

"*Truth is we Claws spotted some massive creature lurking about the mountains when we were out hunting,*" the Claw began.

"*Y'heard of lions, correct?*" Goslingpaw gave him a clueless stare. She

had not been allowed to hear any stories from most of the older cats when she was little, so she knew little to nothing about a cat's ancient ancestors.

"*Y'don't know about lions? Oh right, Littlepaw. I forgot.*" Goslingpaw wrinkled her nose at the smug look in Talonsnarl's eyes and resisted the urge to spit at his face.

"They're massive cats with manes of flaming gold and a roar that can shudder the heavens above; well, I myself was on a patrol to scout for prey in the mountains.

We were all tracking south, hoping to catch a whiff of prey; y'know how scarce it is in this ice-ridden wasteland. Then we hear an almighty roar and bless the Crown Spirits above, we saw it."

Goslingpaw coiled her tail around her paws, interested. "*It?*" Talonsnarl sighed. "*Lion. It lacked the mane but was still more powerful as a thousand of us BlazeClan Claws combined.*

The patrol sighted it taking down a deer; it's a creature like a horse-you know, the ones that trampled around the farm near the western side of our old territory- except this one had antlers."

Goslingpaw nodded. She had seen one before, with a buckskin coat and a palomino mane. Aldertrail had warned her never to go near them as one stomp of their huge hooves would crush a fully grown cat in seconds.

"*We watched it for a good hour or so till it finished its meal and left; we have a sneaking suspicion it's looking for something though we can't tell what*."

Talonsnarl yawned. "*Alright. You done now, Missy? That's all I'll disclose to you.*" Goslingpaw nodded and politely ushered the blue tabby tom away with a respectful dip of the head.

As soon as the arrogant fuzz-head was out of sight, she sighed and slumped down.

Lion. There was a mountain lion lurking around. Hadn't she once heard Cougarstar bragging to his children he was named after a

mountain lion himself for his build, strength and courage?

She imagined the big, mighty BlazeClan leader, except he was twenty times his size. Now that would be terrifying. Now, she recalled with a gulp the musky scent of the den she and her foster parents had sheltered under.

Hadn't there been a tinge of feline scent in there?

Something told Goslingpaw that there was something bigger out there, lurking around and waiting for the golden opportunity to strike when the cats of BlazeClan least expected it.

The cream and brown Littlepaw turned her head towards the cave entrance just as eerie singing made their way to her ears once again.

There was a storm going on outside; snow was falling to the ground like rain. The snowflakes had seemed to have evaporated into a thick, dense fog.

The world beyond the great stone cave was shrouded in cold mist and shrieking gales wailed and howled their mournful song outside.

The Littlepaw blinked. Despite the fog and snow and wind, she could sense something else. She squinted as hard as she could to try and peek out the cave the best she could from where she was sitting.

Was she dreaming, or was that a figure lurking out beyond the icy Tree-Rock?

Quietly, she got to her paws and hurried to the entrance of the cave. She knew a series of cracks on the walls she could easily slip into.

Slipping discreetly into one such crack now, she peered through the narrow opening in the great stone wall and squinted at the figure she thought she saw by the hunting grounds.

Her blood ran cold when she realised she had not been hallucinating at all. There was indeed a creature there, and it

seemed to be looking for something.

Through the mist she could distinguish brown fur and round, fluffy ears. It had a long tail and a distinctly feline-like appearance, though it's size clearly exceeded that of even the biggest BlazeClan cat.

Suddenly, it swung its head around and stared directly at her.

Goslingpaw's breath hitched. Did it see her? Did it know she was there? She didn't know what to do.

"*Goslingpaw, where are you?*" It was Aldertrail. Quickly, the little she-cat squeezed out of the crack and hurried over to where her mentor was, praying that the creature didn't see her at all.

If she had turned around and looked closer, she would have seen the ghostly figure that stood behind her, wings unfolded as it whispered in a spine-chilling voice, "*Set her free.*"

Chapter 15: Powers Unleashed

The bloody rabbit seemed stale in her mouth as the Littlepaw chewed her food. The creature she had seen earlier that day; it's image was etched into her mind.

Now was a rare time of peace in BlazeClan. Every cat was gathered in their own little groups, doing whatever they were doing; it was peaceful.

Too peaceful.

Something nagged at Goslingpaw that there was something big that was about to happen, and a few moments later, she was proven right.

A piercing wail shredded through the air like the shree of a barn owl, jolting every cat up from whatever they had been doing.

The Granite brothers Slatepaw and Stonepaw came dashing into the cave and skidded to a halt. Their fur was wild and bedraggled, and their eyes flashed wildly with fear.

"*Slatepaw! Stonepaw! What are you two doing, gallivanting around like this?*" Admonished Azuregale as he went forward to reprimand them. "*I sent the two of you on a hunting trip, not to fool around like a bunch of chipmunks-"*

"*MOUNTAIN LION!*" A terrified scream cut through the air and moments later Depthpaw came barreling into the cave with a frenzied look of absolute terror on his face.

BlazeClan burst into panic almost immediately; the Claws rushed straight for the various hollows in the cave walls, while the Nettles and Shines fled straight for the small tunnel passageways.

The Prickles hurriedly herded Cottonsong and her kits away into a crevice behind a couple of fallen stalactites and Cougarstar, his

heirs and Dovetail fled for the Drinking Hole.

This left all the apprentices standing there, dazed and unsure of what to do.

For a minute, Goslingpaw was what one would call voice-dazed; she had no idea of her surroundings even as she felt her best friends shivering against her, their bodies shaking with frenzied breaths.

Their moment of hesitation was a moment too long.

A low, terrifying snarl sliced through the loud sounds of the raging snowstorm outside, and a massive shadow fell across the cave entrance.

Goslingpaw felt her heart jump to her mouth when she saw the mountain lion enter the cave. Muscles rippled around its short-haired pelt, its build slender yet muscular at the same time.

Its giant head was lowered to the ground sniffing at the new scents swirling around its abode, and upon glancing up, it locked eyes with the apprentices.

"*Run, you fools!*" Bellowed Cougarstar as he edged out more from his hiding space. This proved to be a terrible mistake.

Immediately, the lion swung its head around and fixed the BlazeClan leader in the piercing glare of its glowing hazel eyes.

Within moments, the lion had lunged at Cougarstar and within seconds had thoroughly torn through his body, shaking the brown furred leader around like a piece of raggedy prey.

The shrieking howl of sheer agony that erupted from Cougarstar's throat was probably the only time she had ever heard the tyrannical BlazeClan leader terrified.

How ironic, he was named after the very creature that would inevitably cause his own demise.

There was no more time to think; seconds later the lion flung the dead, torn-apart body of Cougarstar onto the ground and its

attention focused straight on the group of apprentices.

"*Scatter!*" Shrieked Goslingpaw, and immediately, every apprentice broke off running in different directions. The mighty lion looked around, startled, before its eyes zoomed in on Cootpaw and darted after him.

Goslingpaw herself managed to launch up onto a narrow lip of rock well-out of the lion's reach, and watched with relief as Cootpaw dove into one of the smaller cracks in the cave walls.

Lionpaw and Rockpaw had shot into the space with Lichenthorn, Beetlescar and Dovetail, and the Starpaws managed to flee into a series of cracks lining the cave walls.

For a minute, Goslingpaw felt her heart palpitate even harder when she couldn't find Softpaw, Stonepaw or Slatepaw.

Relief flooded her mind as she saw Softpaw's head poking out a cleft halfway up the cave wall near the Speaking Stone, and the twins crouched on a narrow ledge tucked near the roof.

That relief was soon replaced with horror when she realised Depthpaw and Swanpaw were still down there, and the lion was now advancing towards Depthpaw.

Depthpaw was pressed against the cave walls with nowhere to run; his fur was spiked up and his eyes were so wide with fear they looked as if they would pop out his sockets.

"*Use your powers, Crown Spirits' sake!*" Screamed Thornslash. "*Save my son!*" "*Come on, you fool!*" Roared Gustfang. "*You're the prophecy cat; use your powers to save him!*"

Terrified yowls telling Swanpaw to use her powers to save Depthpaw started resonating through the cave as the lion, now primarily focused on Depthpaw, got closer, fangs dripping and ready to kill.

To Goslingpaw's horror, she ***ran***. Swanpaw didn't even spare a glance at Depthpaw as she ran, terrified, and dove straight into the crack where her mother was.

Thornslash's voice grew shrill with panic as his son began to quake in his spot. Depthpaw was now completely cornered and there was nowhere for him to go.

The voices were singing to her now. She could hear an unknown voice commanding her now.

Free the dragon.

Free the dragon.

Your time has come.

Free her.

Free.

A surge of fresh energy tore through her body and her entire body felt like it was ablaze with white-hot fire. She knew what she had to do.

Bunching up her muscles, the she-cat leapt down from the rock and let out a shrieking caterwaul that could rival even the deadliest winds. The lion immediately turned its head to her and growled in a guttural voice.

Goslingpaw got into a fighting stance as she saw the Titanpaws do, and glared back at the lion as if she was challenging him.

"*Goslingpaw! Get away, you'll get killed!*" Screeched Azuregale, and a chorus of voices began to yell at her to run for her life.

But their voices were dim in her head. All Goslingpaw could hear was the voices chanting.

Free her

Free her

Free her

Free her

Free her

Free her

Set her free

The white-hot fire behind her eyes was blazing now; she snapped open her jaws just as the lion surged towards her, and an almighty roar buffeted the winds.

The lion seemed stunned that a cat ten times smaller than itself had a roar powerful enough to shudder the sky. Her eyes glinted with defiance, and she hoped the lion could hear her thoughts.

"I don't care if you're bigger than me or if you're more powerful. I refuse to submit!"

The she-cat envisioned thorn-riddled vines surging up from the cold rocky ground to strangle the monster that had dared to try and hurt her friend.

With a screech louder than an eagle's, she summoned several massive tendrils that came bursting out of the ground. They lunged directly at the mountain lion, wrapping themselves around his body and throat in a wrathful embrace.

Raw power flowed through her bloodstream now as the little apprentice roared again, this time louder until she thought the heavens would shake.

Free her

Free her

Free her

She wants to be free

More and more tendrils surged from the cave walls, lunging straight at the mountain lion and looping around its massive body in death's embrace.

A guttural cry escaped the massive beast's throat as it struggled to free itself from its net of thorns; all was in vain as the more it struggled, Goslingpaw commanded the tendrils to grow tighter.

With a final piercing scream, a massive crack was heard as a pair of golden-cream wings burst from the lumps on her back.

Emerald-tipped feathers seemed to be sprouting into her coverts faster than lightning, and delicate patterns wove their way into her primaries and her secondary feathers.

She felt something cold loop around her form, and Goslingpaw cracked her eyes open slightly to see a giant reptilian creature with scales of green and gold.

The monster had a magnificent mane of copper and celadon, and antlers of umber and amber sprouted from its head. Its body was long like a snake's, and it had whiskers longer than any regular cat.

But what was most unnerving about the creature was its eyes. The creature had no pupils; just blank white eyes.

It moved at breakneck speed towards the mountain lion and all Goslingpaw saw was the creature lunge for the lion's throat before everything exploded in a ball of white light.

When the light cleared and the ringing in her ears stopped, the creature was gone. The lion's body lay mangled beyond disbelief as the tendrils slithered back into the ground, the cracks sealing up behind them.

Goslingpaw gasped as the white hot fire subsided and her wings hung limply by her side. She was drained; completely drained of energy.

Depthpaw dashed over to her side as she began to stumble. The BlazeClan cats began streaming out of their hiding places, eyes wide with shock at what they had all witnessed.

"No way..."
"It can't be..."
"I thought Swanpaw was the one with powers..?"

"He's dead..."
"Is she alright?"

Everything started spinning before her eyes, and her vision and hearing became disoriented as she staggered once again.

The last thing she saw were those eerie, white eyes staring at her amidst all the chaos and panic.

Then the world went black.

Chapter 16: Surrounded By Love

It was dark.

So dark.

Everything was sore; from her tail tip to her muzzle and from her primaries to her plummels, Goslingpaw felt numb.

"*Wake up, my darling daughter*."

That voice... it compelled her to obey. Finding the strength once again, the cream and brown she-cat cracked open her amber-green eyes only to come face-to-face with her father.

"*Dad?*" She whispered, voice hoarse from her roaring earlier. The cryptid smiled down at her gently and carefully pulled his daughter to her feet.

"Your journey is not over yet, my sweet little hummingbird," he breathed softly, wrapping his wings over her. "*Your clan needs you now more than ever.*"

Her father's downy feathers folded the littler she-cat into a wonderful softness, and Goslingpaw felt herself relax in her father's embrace.

But then the downy, feathery softness began to dissolve into something else. *How curious*, she thought, for she could still feel the softness but it was as if it were becoming fog.

A huge fog bank began to surge around her form. *Am I flying or am I sleeping?* She wondered.

She glanced up at her father, and he smiled down at her before murmuring, "*Fly high, my daughter. Fly to the Valley Cats*."

Then the fog swirled around her, and the beloved form of Rippling Leaf along with the starry grounds of the Realm Of Shining Suns disappeared.

For a while, Goslingpaw thought she was still floating around in the darkened chasm of dreamless sleep.

Hang on...

Was that someone shaking her?

"*Wake up, Goslingpaw! Wake up!*" Upon hearing the call, her amber-green eyes flashed open and she found herself looking straight up at the wide blue eyes of Slatepaw.

"*She's awake!*" He yowled with joy and relief in his voice, and immediately many other cats came rushing over. The first to reach was her foster mother.

"*My baby! Oh, my darling baby*," gasped Aldertrail as she swiftly pulled the young cryptid into her warm embrace. Goslingpaw squeaked in surprise, but nestled into her foster mother's fur nonetheless.

The next to hurry over was obviously Azuregale, followed closely by Stonepaw, Depthpaw and Softpaw. All of them let out mews of joy upon realising their beloved friend- or in Azuregale's case, daughter- was alive.

Beechwhisker and Gustfang pelted over too, and let out sighs of sheer relief upon realising that Goslingpaw was alive and well.

"Goslingpaw... you have wings..?" Azuregale asked, and the small cream and brown she-cat lifted her lovely narrow, streamlined wings.

Her coverts were the same pale shade of brown as the fading patch on her face, and her secondary feathers faded into the light creamy colour of her main pelt.

Her primary feathers became lighter until they became gold and eventually white, and emerald green swirls wove their way through

each feather, forming an intricate pattern with small green leaf shapes scattered around.

"*I... I guess I do,*" she replied, blinking her amber-green eyes up at her foster father. Then, swift pawsteps announced the arrival of Thornslash.

Azuregale tensed visibly when the russet tom approached, but Thornslash didn't seem interested in bothering him. Instead, he turned to Goslingpaw and swiftly bowed down.

"*Thank you so much for saving my son,"* he choked out. "*I... I don't know what I would've done if I lost him.*" Goslingpaw stared at him in surprise.

"*It-It's no problem, really. Any cat would've done the same if it was their most loved one in his place*," she responded. "*But it is not what your sister has done*," Thornslash muttered, his eyes overshadowing with rage.

The rage simmered down for a minute, then his gaze softened as he turned to Depthpaw and asked, "*What do you say to the one who saved your life, my son?*"

Depthpaw bowed his head deeply down to her and responded gratefully, "*Thank you for saving my life. I owe you so much for doing so.*"

Goslingpaw blinked in surprise. "*You don't owe me anything, Depthpaw! I'm just glad you're alright,*" she mewed. She flicked an ear, before hesitantly asking, "*What happened to Swanpaw?*"

"*Your coward sister and her idiot mother won't stop trying to get their way and Dovetail keeps proclaiming Swanpaw is really the one with powers and you stole them from her*," Beechwhisker sighed.

Goslingpaw tensed. She knew something like this would happen. Then, Aldertrail wrapped her soft tail around her smaller form and muttered, "*They don't matter, my sweet. What truly matters is that you're alive and safe*."

Goslingpaw blinked, and appreciatively nestled into her mentor's

soft fur. The peace was short-lived, however, as a few moments later, an earsplitting caterwaul tore through the cavern.

Goslingpaw flinched and huddled deeper into her mentor's fur while her friends backed up closer to her as Beetlescar and Lichenfrost came into view.

"*If we're done with the sappy, touching reunion,*" his oozing, low voice purred, a menacing tone heard in it. "*I should probably thank you pesky gnats for getting rid of my father for me*."

At this statement, he flicked his head over to Slatepaw and Stonepaw, then later Goslingpaw who all bristled at being called pesky gnats. "*I mean; leading the lion to the cave and unleashing your cute plant powers to kill him? Something I never would've thought of*," he sneered.

Azuregale cut in, stepping forward. "*Where are you going with this?*" He hissed gravely, eyes narrowing to slits as he glared at the brown tom. Beetlescar glared back, his smirk growing wider.

"*But I think I'll thank you pests later. For now, I'm one step away from claiming the throne that is rightfully mine."* Beetlescar's narrowed eyes flitted over to Azuregale. His eyes flickered dangerously with the tinge of lust for power.

"*And that step, dear, beloved Azuregale*..." he stepped forward until the two toms were both standing eye-to-eye.

"I*s finally getting rid of you."*

Gustfang sprang to his paws immediately. "*Will you listen to yourself?!*" He shouted. "*Your father just died! He coddled you his whole life; he might be terrible, but at least show some respect and basic decency and mourn him!*"

"*Why would I care for that mangy old possum for?*" Cackled Beetlescar. "*His power is all I want, and killing you,*" he gestured to Azuregale. "*Is all I have to do to earn that power!*"

Lichenfrost flattened her ears and sighed. Her head was hung low. Beetlescar didn't seem to notice, because he turned to her and

laughed cruelly, "*Just think of it, my dear sister! We have all the power we dreamed of; I'll be the king!*"

Lichenfrost seemed less enthusiastic than Goslingpaw thought, and as Beetlescar smugly marched off, she cast them a look of uncertainty and fear before following her brother.

Azuregale drew in a breath. "*What are you going to do?*" Thornslash asked in a quavering voice. "*You can forfeit if you want, Azuregale. Let Beetlescar have the throne; it's better than risking your life*."

"*No*." Azuregale's eyes flashed. "*I will fight for the future of BlazeClan if it's the last thing I do.*" A flame of searing determination flashed in his eyes, and his lifted his head up high.

"*I will go down fighting if it means this clan will be in safe paws once more*."

Chapter 17: Challenge And Fail

Venomous hissing erupted from the two toms as they circled each other menacingly, hackles raised and claws extended. Goslingpaw sat on the sidelines, eyes locked on her father and shivering with anticipation and fear.

The challenge was on; there had been no time to mourn for Cougarstar. His corpse had been dragged out and buried under a pile of snow in a haphazard way.

Beetlescar had announced the royal challenge almost immediately once night had set. Half the clan was on his side, while the other half supported Azuregale instead.

Aldertrail had approached him before the challenge duel, and Goslingpaw had heard their conversation.

Aldertrail had asked, "*You don't have to kill him. You can just forfeit and let Beetlescar win*." She had paused here, and had sighed wistfully, "*I don't know how I'll cope without you*."

Azuregale had sighed, and replied, "*It's too late for that, I'm afraid, my dear. I've wished to be the BlazeClan leader badly enough to fight to keep my position as deputy for all these moons in hopes of redirecting the clan to a better path*."

His eyes glinted. "*I can't back down now that it's just me and the son of one of the most tyrannical leaders that graced the earth with his presence.*"

Now, as she watched the two toms snarl profanities at each other, she desperately hoped Azuregale would survive. She knew if Beetlescar won the she-cats of the clan would be in grave danger.

Beetlescar made the first swipe. He darted forward and nimbly landed a blow on Azuregale's flank, earning a hiss is surprise more than pain.

Letting out a snarl, Azuregale darted at Beetlescar and in a Swift, sudden movement, bit down viciously on his shoulder and darted away once again as Beetlescar yowled and swiped a paw at his head.

Beetlescar then charged forward to headbutt the silver tom, only for Azuregale to leap out of the way and launch himself over the brown tom's stockier form and slash at his flank.

The two toms continued hissing as they launched their attacks, colliding with a terrible grunting roar and an impact that shook the ground.

Rearing up, Azuregale sank his claws into Beetlescar's shoulders; twisting them hard. Beetlescar shook his head, gripped at the other's silver flank with his claws, and raked his flesh in return.

They broke apart, only to slam together once more, jaws wide and claws tearing. Goslingpaw felt her heart leap to her throat as the clan cheered for the cat they supported, and she found it unnerving that her foster mother was completely silent.

Finally, at one point, Azuregale got slammed to the ground after being tackled by Beetlescar. *"Foolish Azuregale, you should've given up instead of challenging me. This would've made your death less humiliating!"*

"*I'm doing what's best for BlazeClan!*" Growled Azuregale. "*The clan has no room for code-breakers like you!*" Beetlescar scoffed and snarled back, "*That's rich coming from the cat who took a Nettle as his mate!*"

Gasps echoed throughout the cavern and beside her, Goslingpaw felt Aldertrail go still. "*You heard me, BlazeClan!*" Shouted Beetlescar. "*Your oh-so honest and loyal deputy broke the code! He took a Nettle as his mate!*"

Whispers started coming from every direction, and Goslingpaw cast a look of horror at her foster mother. But Aldertrail's expression was unreadable, lifeless as a carved stone statue.

"*Which Nettle, you might be asking? Well, who is the only Nettle here with an apprentice she's raising as her own daughter?*" Taunted Beetlescar.

Immediately, every cat's eyes turned to Aldertrail. Yet, the brown she-cat made no movement and her expression never changed.

What happened next occured in a blur. Suddenly, a horrible, rage-filled roar seemed to fill the entire cavern as Azuregale suddenly heaved himself to the ground and slammed Beetlescar to the ground.

He forced the brown tabby into a tight lock and began shredding apart his pelt with the ferocity of a rabid dog. His glinting white claws became slick with crimson blood as patches of fur, then flesh were ripped off Beetlescar's body.

Beetlescar screeched with pain and delivered fierce kicks and blows to Azuregale's flank, but to no avail. The silver tom suddenly latched his claws onto the left side of the brown tom's face, and dug them deep into the flesh.

An ear splitting howl of agony erupted from Beetlescar's throat and with a sick, wet sound, Azuregale wrenched the brown tom's *eye* free from its socket and hurled it to the stone floor.

The sight of that one singular eyeball rolling on the ground was enough to make Goslingpaw nauseous, and already she could hear one of the Granite brothers throwing up.

There was an almighty thump as Beetlescar was forced into the submissive position by the silver coated tom, with the brown tabby successfully pinned under his claws.

The entire population of BlazeClan had gathered, eyes widened with horror and watching in silence. No cat did anything to stop him.

The deep brown tom had suddenly began wailing in one long, high-pitched scream. Goslingpaw stopped and pressed herself back against the wall, horrified. Her wings hung limply by her side like

stone weights.

Most horrifyingly, Azurestar had began to yank out each of Beetlescar's claws and even some of his teeth one by one. They scattered across the grey floor of the stone cavern, tiny and white.

In that moment, Azuregale was not a father or the steadfast deputy of BlazeClan; he had turned into a blood-slicked monster, filled with a burning fury and vengeful passion to exterminate his prey.

Now Azuregale had his claws stabbed into the former heir's exposed throat with each claw penetrating a different angle of the soft flesh. Fountains of blood gushed out the wound, nearly forming a scene one would see in a lush rainforest.

Would I have to do that, if I were a leader? Could I ever, ever do that? Aldertrail had edged over to Elmriver out of terror, with her eyes tightly shut and her paws over her ears. The larger she quietly pulled her close, her face locked in a permanent blank stare.

Azuregale's eyes glinted in a slow, menacing way before he began to hiss out something to the disgraced heir. Goslingpaw didn't hear most of it, but she guessed Beetlescar was hearing about how he'd better off dead to the clan.

Beetlescar tried to reply, but his efforts were weak. The BlazeClan deputy snarled and twisted his claws harder into his throat when he tried to speak. Beetlescar gurgled up a bubble of blood with each and every try that failed.

His jaws moved again, and then, as his head began to loll sideways, he spotted someone amongst the BlazeClan cats crowded all around them.

The chocolate brown tom clutched at the BlazeClan deputy's claws and pointed, his mouth forming words frantically as blood mixed with saliva foamed out his maw.

He was pointing straight at Swanpaw.

She stared back, eyes wide with confusion.

Azuregale leaned down, pressing Beetlescar harder into the floor. One more message was hissed through his teeth, and then he seized Beetlescar's head in his paws and, just like a squirrel with a nut, smashed it with the force of a lion against the blood-soaked stone floor.

Goslingpaw turned away just in time, huddling around herself with her eyes closed. She didn't care if she looked like a one-moon-old kitten, hiding her face. She did not want that image in her head for the rest of her life.

Azuregale stood there, chest heaving as he breathed in and out for a while. He was thoroughly soaked in blood and he looked like a deranged beast. For a long time, there was silence, with only the sounds of his breathing echoing around the cavern.

Then, those celestial blue eyes slitted and faced the whole of BlazeClan once again.

"*I have won the challenge*," he snarled in a low voice. "*And I shall now be addressed as Azurestar*."

Chapter 18: The Choosing

Every single apprentice sat tall, postures regal and proud. The rest of BlazeClan gathered around them, watching the apprentices with apprehension and pride. The ground before the Speaking Rock was all clean.

It was the day.

The Choosing.

The apprentices were all in their best form; they had a fresh and neat pelt, and the she-cats were decorated in flowers while the toms were decorated in vines. All of them had been looking forward to this day.

They were very excited for today, for the chosen one would go and accompany the leader to receive his blessings from their great spirits and ancestors.

The tradition had been added a long time ago- when Blazestar decided that a cat at the tender and innocent age of a trainee would accompany the future leader to witness him receiving his lives.

Goslingpaw knew she couldn't be selected, and she probably shouldn't. After all, she was just a healer apprentice, not a cat as strong as a Titanpaw nor as beautiful as a Starpaw.

Sure, she had powers and all that whatnot, but there were other apprentices who were better at her in things of higher regard than healing.

Earlier, her mother Dovetail had forced her to grow flowers for the rest of the apprentices as a way of masking the fact she wanted 'payment for disgracing your sister', and as the mentors chose the accessories for their apprentices, she wasn't even allowed to take any of the flowers she grew and Dovetail sneered at Goslingpaw to find her own.

Luckily, while sniffing through the small nooks and crannies, she found two beautiful red roses, and found out they once belonged to Cottonsong. When she asked the nursing queen for the flowers, the the white she-cat agreed immediately.

She came back to where all the other apprentices were gathered, and Dovetail, upon seeing the two roses, insisted that the Littlepaw give her flowers to Swanpaw because she was by far the 'prettiest and smartest' of them.

Goslingpaw didn't budge, and Dovetail seemed to resemble an enraged bear from how she reacted.

But it was time.

Azurestar entered the clearing, towering before the clan. His lean legs took neat, purposeful steps towards them, and Dovetail immediately put on a face like she cared for her and Swanpaw equally (which was quite evident she didn't).

Swanpaw and the other Starpaws adjusted their flowers and the Titanpaws tried to put on a confident expression. Goslingpaw knew she didn't stand a chance. She just slumped in the corner, and most of the apprentices gave her smug smirks.

"I request all of you to look your best in front of your leader."

That deep voice was enough to make the cream and brown Littlepaw, along with every other apprentice, jump out of their pelts.

She immediately took to a confident stance and took to her foster father's eyes with quiet but bold, searing determination.

Across her, from the corner of her eyes, she could see Softpaw looking down at her paws with a nervous expression on her face, Depthpaw trying to appear as small as possible and the younger Granite brothers looking as if they didn't care a pile of raccoon dung whether they were chosen or not.

Azurestar eyed Swanpaw and Depthpaw, and Goslingpaw wanted to slump back into the corner again. The silver furred leader then

spread his gaze across the gathered apprentices, who tried to sit taller.

When he came to Goslingpaw, she tried her best not to collapse or faint. Azurestar seemed to notice her efforts to make herself look brave and determined.

A moment of eerie silence later, he turned, bounded up to the rock and pulled himself into a regal posture to address the clan and thus began to say the fated words.

"*BlazeClan, I have selected the apprentice who will follow me to witness the receiving of my blessings from the Crown Spirits*."

Before he could continue speaking, almost immediately Dovetail excitedly interrupted, "*Who is it, Azurestar??*"

Dovetail looked triumphantly at Swanpaw, who puffed out her chest with a prideful smirk and Thornslash grinned at Depthpaw, who just gave his father a strained smile back and tried to appear even smaller.

Goslingpaw just sighed and waited for the lucky apprentice's name to be said and for them to spring up in joy.

"*Come with me*," Azurestar paused for a moment, before stating the name.

"*Goslingpaw*."

There was shocked silence for a few moments, before a voice, equally enraged and shocked, bellowed, "*WHAT?!*" The blue eyed tom's narrow gaze glared daggers at her mother. "*You heard me*."

"*How could you choose this-this disgrace over the prophecy cat?!*" Screeched Dovetail, rounding on Azurestar. "*She stole Swanpaw's powers! You should cast her out in the snow!*"

Azurestar's response was to lash out a paw and strike her mother straight on the face. The wound was superficial, but Dovetail leaped back in shock with a yelp.

"*And what has been proven of your nonsense, Dovetail?*" Hissed the silver tom menacingly. "*You say your daughter has powers, you claim nonstop that she's the prophecy cat and that she's destined to lead the clan to better places. Tell me, has she ever done that?*"

"*I-*" "*Your daughter Swanpaw has proven to be nothing but trouble since the start. Always interfering with the Titanpaws in their training, never lifting a claw to help around camp, fleeing to save her own pelt when others are in danger? I don't think that's how a prophecy cat behaves,*" he growled.

His sharp blue eyes turned to Goslingpaw. "*Whereas look at Goslingpaw. She works her paws off to help the clan despite all the nasty things she has said to her on a daily basis. She saved Depthpaw from death while Swanpaw ran away like the coward she is.*"

At this, many cats turned to stare at Swanpaw, who seemed to have deflated and shrank back. Her earlier confidence had vanished almost entirely, and she seemed nervous now.

"*As for why I chose Goslingpaw, it is because she possesses a heart unlike any other. Do tell me, when have any of the Titanpaws actually gone out their way to help others aside from Depthpaw, Slatepaw and Stonepaw instead of taking other's credit?*"

At this, all the other Titanpaws shrank back in embarrassment at being called out. "*The Starpaws have let arrogance and pride get to their head and as such, most have contributed nothing to BlazeClan aside from being a bother*."

The Starpaws all gasped and stuttered, shocked at the fact they had been put down like that. Azurestar gazed at Stonepaw, Slatepaw, Softpaw and Depthpaw, and his gaze seemed to soften.

"*Depthpaw has proven time and time again that he has the potential to be a good warrior, and he is a cat with a heart of gold. But I did not choose him because he possesses a lack of being able to stand up for himself*."

His eyes flashed over to the Granite brothers. "*Slatepaw and Stonepaw are good candidates too, but Stonepaw has a lack of self-*

control and focus and Slatepaw, while your resilience is admirable, the reason I did not select you is because you have yet to learn to listen to others and take advice when you need it."

The three Titanpaws blinked and nodded respectfully, before chorusing, "*We will do our best to be better!*" Azurestar and a portion of the clan let out mrrows of laughter before the silver leader turned to Softpaw.

"*Softpaw, you are a kind soul. You are honest and you like to embrace the beauty of the world. But because of the incident, I feel like it is the best for you to take some more time to recover fully instead of having the pressure of this on your back*," he mewed gently.

Softpaw nodded quietly and dipped her head respectfully. "*Now. Goslingpaw, come with me. We will go to the drinking hole right now to see the spirits.*"

The cream and brown Littlepaw got to her paws and quickly scrambled after her foster father as cheers came from the gathered cats.

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The water was cold, to no one's surprise. Yet, Goslingpaw couldn't help the chuckle that came from her upon seeing her foster father flinch upon dipping his muzzle in.

"*You will get used to it, father,*" she murmured. She watched as Azurestar tucked his forepaws under his chest and let his muzzle fall a little deeper into the pool of icy water.

The shock of icy water briefly did battle with a heavy wave of tiredness that washed over her as well. She then let herself slip into sleep, but soon the sound of whispers made her sit up and look around.

They were now once more in the starry valley she had visited many times in her dreams, gleaming silver in the moonlight, but now the slopes were filled with rows of cats, glowing and murmuring.

She saw Azurestar gaping as he saw winged cats stepping down the hills to approach him, brushing their ways through the grass with

neat and purposeful steps.

However, soon a familiar whistle pierced the air. Soft footsteps sounded beside her, and she turned to see Rippling Leaf.

"*Dad!*" She cheered jubilantly and pelted over to her father before leaping into his wings with joy. Those large feathery wings wrapped around her and his sweet scent flooded her nostrils.

"*Blazeclaw!*" Goslingpaw peeled out of her birth father's feathers to see Azurestar staring at him in shock. "*Greetings, Azure. I hope you've been raising my little hatchling well?*" The mackerel tabby asked in a teasing voice.

The silver tom immediately blinked and hurriedly said, "*Of course I have, Blazeclaw. I wouldn't dare mistreat your daughter*." "*That's comforting to hear,*" he chuckled.

His golden gaze turned serious. "*Enough talk, however. It is time for you to receive your blessings from us*." Azurestar shuffled nervously, glancing around, before he awkwardly asked, "*Why isn't there anyone I recognise here?*"

The mackerel tabby laughed gently. "*Because you are among the souls of the Tribe Of Shining Suns in Lumorae, not among your Crown Spirits.*"

Azurestar's eyes went wide with shock as the starry winged cats brushed into the clearing and surrounded him, stars woven into their fur like beads of glimmering silver.

"*I.. what? You are...*" Goslingpaw watched as her birth father stood up and strode towards Azurestar. "*Allow me to fully introduce myself*," he mewed regally.

"*I am Rippling Leaf, a warrior of the Tribe Of The Blooming Valley and the brother of Queen Morning Glory. I, along with the other souls here, hail from the Northern Valley Kingdoms of Embala, and my gift to you is the courage to make the hardest decisions.*"

The silver tom breathed sharply as Rippling Leaf touched noses with him, and as he stepped back, the next cat to tread forth was

one with a pelt of the sleekest brown and white. Her eyes were the colour of sunlit ice.

"*My name is Boreal, warrior of the Guild Of Freedom. My gift to you is clear judgment of character, for the ability to see the value of some cats, and the threat posed by others*." She touched noses with Azurestar, and the silver tom seemed to be stunned for a split moment.

As Boreal treaded back, two cats stepped forth this time, one a color-point russet and fawn tom with teal eyes and the other a smoke gray, cream, and white she-cat with sharp green eyes.

"*I am Spindle and this is my sister Ivy,*" the teal-eyed tom rumbled. "*We come from the Golden Rose Cult. My gift to you is the pride in your Clan, to honor the legacy left by the leaders who have walked this path and to have the courage to lay down your own paw prints over theirs*."

He touched noses, and Azurestar gave a troubled sigh. "*This is your chance to shape BlazeClan's destiny,*" he warned. "*Use it wisely.*"

Then, his sister stepped forth. "*My gift to you is exploring beyond the borders of your Clan, for seeing the possibilities that lie in unexpected places, and the untrodden paths that wait to be discovered*." She touched noses with him once again.

"You are not trapped by your invisible boundaries. If you cannot find the answers within them, then look farther off. There is always hope somewhere."

Then as Spindle and Ivy backed away, Azurestar gazed with awe at the next two cats who came forth. "*Deepwave and... Whistletail? From the Kin Of The Restless Veil?*"

"*So you've heard of us from the legends,*" purred the first cat, a she-cat with silky tawny brown fur and feathers stained with pink and purple.

The other let out an amused mrrow as he twitched his tail; he was shorter than Deepwave, but was lankier and more slender. He had black, cream, and cinnamon fur with sharp yellow eyes that pierced the misty night.

Deepwave stepped forth. "*My gift to you is speaking out against injustice, for pursuing the truth above all else. Lies will bring shadows in where darker things hide. Never fear the truth, however blinding it may be*."

They touched noses, and from the way her foster father flinched Goslingpaw assumed it hurt. Then, Whistletail padded to him.

"*My gift to you is trust in your instincts as well as the ones of your clanmates. You are leader, and you can steer the course where the young paws of your clan takes*." He stretched his head up and touched his nose to Azurestar's muzzle.

Goslingpaw watched as the two cats retreated back to the ranks. Three more blessings left; who would bear them this time?

Her question was answered soon enough as a dark green-grey cat with sharp emerald eyes and paler speckles scattered across her pelt strode forth, steps confident and bold.

"*I am Emerald Song, warrior of the Tribe Of The Blooming Valley. My blessing for you is compassion*," she murmured. "*Understand what is important to other cats, not just yourself, and let that guide your paws.*"

She was taller than Azurestar, and as she bent down to touch noses the tips of her sleek wings grazed the silver tom's head, and he shivered. The last two cats to step forward was a white, cream, and smoke gray she-cat with hyacinth eyes and a dappled russet and cinnamon tom with deep amber eyes and curled ears.

"*I am Cobweb and this is Flashtread,*" meowed the tom. "*I hail from the Golden Rose Cult while my mate here comes from the Guild Of Freedom*."

He rested his nose against Azurestar's muzzle, and breathed, "*My blessing to you is farsightedness, understanding what the results of your actions might be, however distant in the future. It may be the hardest and loneliest part of your duty as leader, but essential to keep your Clan safe*."

Cobweb's deep amber eyes glinted with sorrow. "*Do not rush into*

anything. It will not turn out well," he meowed grimly as he stepped back.

Flashtread, the last cat, came forward. She was small and very lanky, and Goslingpaw noticed Azurestar wince when he saw the scar that stretched from her jaw all the way down to her belly.

"*Surprised by my scar, aren't we?*" She chuckled, before stretching her head upwards so her nose brushed the silver tom's muzzle gently.

"*My gift to you is mercy, for knowing that victory can leave both cats standing. Your opponent may have been the lesser cat in this battle, but they deserve to live and have a chance to try again*."

The pair of mates stepped back, and Rippling Leaf took control once more. "*The warriors of the Northern Kingdoms in the Tribe Of Shining Suns have spoken. Welcome, Azurestar!*" He roared.

From that point on, the sky seemed to shake and thunder with the sound of cats chanting out Azurestar's name, and the silver tom seemed very overwhelmed by it all.

As Goslingpaw treaded to her foster father's side, she looked around and locked gazes with her dearest birth father and all the legends of the stories she had been told. Her father smiled warmly at her, and she returned the smile back at him.

The starlit cats began to fade in front of them, and as they woke from their deep slumber, Goslingpaw turned to face her foster father. "*Wow... that was overwhelming...*" he gasped.

Goslingpaw smiled and butted her father's shoulder with her head gently. "*Come on, father,*" she purred. "*You have a Clan to lead*."

Azurestar smiled down at her, and tails twined, foster daughter and father left the cave, the spirits shimmering overhead gazing proudly down.

Chapter 19: A Vision Foretold

The shadows seemed particularly welcoming that night.

Goslingpaw was quietly reciting a tale she had been told by Azuregale many nights when she couldn't sleep. Every cat around her was already away in dreamland now, not one cat was awake.

As of right now, she was curled with her foster parents and her friends, all of whom were all fast asleep. Their snores punctured the still, cold air of the cave, mostly coming from Stonepaw and Slatepaw.

Azurestar and Aldertrail were tightly curled around her, shielding the little cream and brown she-cat from the cold the best they could.

Tucking her head under her wings, Goslingpaw quietly recited the soft words of the story passed down generations to generations from the faraway lands of the Northern Kingdoms where the bravest warriors came from.

"*In a glimmering time when the seconds slow between the last minute of the old year and the first minute of the new year, when the world on this night was sheathed in ice, there was a cryptid born in the kingdom of the North Waters and his name was Valley.*"

Her half-lidded eyes drifted to the cave entrance as she continued quietly reciting the tale to herself, watching the snowflakes swirl down to the white ground gently.

"*Some say there was an enchantment cast upon this cryptid called Valley at the time of his birth. He was said to have been given natural gifts of an extraordinary power.*"

She paused, trying to remember the rest of the tale Azurestar had told her.

"*But what was known for certain of him was that he inspired others to great and noble deeds. Although he wore no crown of gold, many knew him as a king.*"

The memories seemed to falter here; Goslingpaw could not remember what it was her foster father had said to her. Her eyes continued to scan the outside world from the cavern.

A flurry of motion caught her eye. She blinked; had she been seeing things? Lifting up her head, she found herself staring into an eerie golden glow that seemed to pierce the night.

She squinted closer; she couldn't see anything else but that enchanting yet eerie golden stare.

Moonlight shone through the cavern entrance, illuminating up the darkness that blanketed the cave.

She was not seeing things. There was someone there.

As the creature stepped closer, striding with purposeful steps, Goslingpaw felt a pang of surprise upon realising this was a cryptid spirit.

But it was not her father, nor any of the cats who gave Azurestar his blessings.

This cat had sleek colour-point light brown and smoke gray fur with deep golden eyes, and the set of wings on her back were scaled, not feathered.

Unlike her father, this new stranger had a tail that narrowed down to a whip-thin end, and her entire form was frosted over with dazzling white light.

"*Hello, little one*." Goslingpaw blinked. The she-cat's voice was soothing, almost melodic to her ears. "*I have traveled far to see you.*"

"*Who are you?*" As she spoke, she felt herself step out of her body. She was standing and walking towards the spirit, and yet she was still there on the ground. She could see herself curled up with her parents surrounding her.

But, at the same time, she could see something moving out of him. It was her shape, pale and misty and swirling like the fog. She stepped towards the newcomer until they were a tail-length away.

The colour-point she-cat gave her a humoured smile. "*Call me Tarragon,*" she rumbled. Her whip-thin tail twitched, and Goslingpaw felt herself shiver at how tall this she-cat was. "*I come from the Golden Rose Cult.*"

"*You cannot stay here forever, my dear*," Tarragon tilted her head and murmured, glowing golden eyes gentle and calm. "*The Valley is where you belong, not the mountains.*"

Goslingpaw gazed blankly at her. "*The Tribe Of The Blooming Valley needs a heir. You are the only one capable of taking that spot*." Tarragon flicked a tufted ear. "*Your cousins cannot lead the tribe forever.*"

"*Cousins?*" "*Rippling Leaf had a sister, Morning Glory. She had a litter of three, two she-kits and one tom-kit. But the runt of the litter, Dahlia, was stillborn,*" Tarragon explained.

Goslingpaw made an 'oh' sound of understanding. "*But.. what can I do? Most of the clan still doesn't trust me. How can I lead them to safety if they don't believe in me?*"

"*They must very soon. Your journey, dear, is nowhere near complete yet,*" Tarragon meowed simply.

She leaned down until she and the cream and brown Littlepaw were muzzle-to-muzzle, and Goslingpaw felt a chill looking into those slits of liquid gold. "*I have a message to pass on to you, little wren*," she added.

"*Wren?*" Goslingpaw cocked her head, confused.

"*Your father used to talk about what he'd name his kits if he had any. Wren was the first name he thought of,*" chuckled Tarragon.

The tall, lanky she-cat exhaled once more, and in her soft melodic voice she began to recite the message she had received from her fellow spirits above:

"*As the avian follows the voices down the peaks,*
She will find half the answers that she seeks.
Elements opposing one another bound by love,
Come by the oath of the ones above.
The group of flames must traverse across the sea,
To find the kingdom shrouded in mist for all eternity."

"*How is that going to help me guide BlazeClan to safety?*" The Littlepaw whispered, confused and awestruck.

"*That is up to you to find out. I cannot steer your paws or guide you all the way, but I will always be up in the stars walking with you, little wren,*" Tarragon breathed.

The words exploded in Goslingpaw's head. She glanced up at Tarragon once again. The cryptid was dissolving before her eyes. The mists that had been her shape were swirling, seeping away.

Goslingpaw reached out with her paws to reach Tarragon's fading form. "*Don't go! Don't go. What do you mean? Come back, come back!*"

"*What're you yelling about, Gos? Wake us all up, will you?"*
Goslingpaw was suddenly back on the ground, and Depthpaw was resting in front of her, blinking.

How had she gotten on the ground? She had been away from the group of huddled cats a moment ago but she had no memory of returning back to them. And there was no mist now.

None at all.

"*I'm sorry, Depth. I thought I saw something so I went to investigate over there."* She nodded toward the place she had been standing earlier.

"*No, you didn't,*" He murmured, puzzled. "*I woke up a few minutes ago. You were sleeping right here on the ground." "I was right here?*"
Goslingpaw was incredulous.

"*Course you were, Gos,*" Depthpaw said and looked at her curiously as if she'd gone insane. "*Right here you were. I would have noticed you if you'd moved away, believe me.*"

Had it just been a dream? Goslingpaw thought. But it felt so real. She heard Tarragon's voice in her head. It was real. It had to be.

As she and Depthpaw settled down to sleep again, Goslingpaw heard the distant sound of singing and chimes humming their ancient melodies to her, and something deep in her heart quivered.

"*I'll be home soon.*"

Chapter 20: Hymn Of... Welcoming?

"Azurestar, you must be crazy!"

Beechwhisker was standing in front of the silver tom, eyes wide in disbelief and tail lashing to and fro. "*We can't go out there in all that freezing ice! What about Cottonsong's kits?!*"

Azurestar seemed pretty frustrated as well. "*Beechwhisker, the mountains is no place for BlazeClan. The kits and apprentices are still suffering and all of us cannot live in this ice-ridden wasteland when we don't know how to hunt here*."

"*We can try!*" Cried Beechwhisker. "*The kits can't possibly survive if we try to even move anywhere in this weather! It's too cold and too dangerous, they're barely old enough!"*

It had been two and a quarter moons since BlazeClan had moved to the mountains. Many had already grown discontent with the cold weather and bad hunting, and nearly every cat wanted to leave as soon as possible.

But Beechwhisker and a portion of the cats were not sure if they could ever leave the confines of the stony grey cave in the mountains.

The mountains seemed to snow eternally and snowstorms raged at unpredictable moments. It was forever icy in the mountains too, and any body heat seemed to be sucked away by the stone almost instantly.

"*Beechwhisker, please! We have to move someplace warmer, no cat can survive in weather this horrendous where healing herbs are near nonexistent here!*" Azurestar finally snapped in exasperation.

The other tom frowned, and turned to the cream and brown

Littlepaw, who was perched on a flat stone nearby, for her opinion.

But Goslingpaw's attention was drawn elsewhere. She had spotted a single white avian soaring about, riding the thermals hidden in air pockets within the wintry chill of the peaks.

Many followed her gaze, and gaped as the bird swooped into the cave and landed on a cleft of rock, and perched there, staring down at the cats below.

"*Strange*," she heard Vinespring murmur. "*Snow geese don't usually come to the mountains*."

The goose looked normal to every other BlazeClan cat; it had pristine white plumage, webbed feet and an angular face with an orange beak.

But Goslingpaw saw something about that snow goose that made her eyes grow wide. Those gleaming amber eyes were so familiar, too familiar.

Could it be?

Then, as if on command with her thoughts, the goose swung its head around and stared directly at her.

It was all too obvious now. Those gleaming amber orbs were etched in her memory forever, from the moment she first saw him to their last interaction within the starry valley realm of the Tribe of Shining Suns.

"*Rippling Leaf,*" she breathed out, mist billowing out her nose and muzzle. The goose blinked once, twice, then dived down from the cleft and flew directly at her.

"*Goslingpaw!*" Yowled Azurestar in alarm, but the cream and brown Littlepaw didn't budge. The bird looped circles around her twice, then with a great honking cry, flew straight out of the cave.

It was at this moment she could hear the voices again now. "*Come with me, come with me!*" They seemed to be singing, and this time she could decipher every word clear as day.

Then, her father's voice cut through the others in her head. "*Come with me, my little hatchling. The Northern Kingdoms are waiting for you.*"

That was all the boost she needed.

With a mighty bound, the little winged she-cat leapt to her paws and bounded after the goose. Turning her head, she yowled, "*We have to go! We must leave at once!*"

She barely registered the confused yowling from the BlazeClan cats behind her, only focusing on the mighty avian above her that was circling the sky and letting out honking cries to her to guide her way.

As she raced along the rocky terrain, eyes trained on the wingspan of the snow goose flying high in the sky, she soon felt two cats running beside her, and a quick side glance at both sides revealed both her best friends the younger granite brothers by her side.

She could hear the rocks crumbling as she dashed down the mountain, and as she snuck a glance behind her relief surged through her veins when she saw the kits being held by their scruffs by both Elmriver and the Prickles.

A shrieking gust of wind had just started to kick up to, and icy cold wind whipped through her fur. She ignored the screaming pain in her paws as a particularly sharp rock slashed it open, gritting her teeth.

Behind her, the Claws had all formed a herding formation, surrounding the she-cats and apprentices as they followed the three apprentices down the precarious peaks.

Led by Azuregale, the silver tom charged forth, and as Goslingpaw glanced back for a slight moment, she felt joy surge to her heart when she saw Azurestar and Aldertrail running side by side.

A loud cry from the goose brought her back to her senses and she glanced forward again. Far up ahead she could see the seemingly endless snow coming to an end somewhere further down.

Goslingpaw gritted her teeth and new energy burst through her body. With a strong bound, she leapt forth and dashed toward the ending snow with a determined snarl. She could feel the air becoming warmer, and it eased her lungs.

As her paws started hurting rock more than snow and slush, a final honking cry from the snow goose above caught her attention and she finally came to a halt when she finally felt grass under her paws.

Her eyes flashed wildly, and as the rest of BlazeClan gathered around her, she took a moment to study her surroundings.

There were small patches of grass around the mountain, but most of the ground around was smooth stone with a giant RoadWalker structure parked in an area on the stone marked with white.

Goslingpaw could see that a few tail-lengths away from the structure was a dip that made way for two narrow silver paths connected by wooden planks with the ground surrounding the dip covered in gravel.

Unease made its way into Goslingpaw's gut. "*Where are we?*" Croaked Chervilsky. "*We were supposed to go home, not some lifeless RoadWalker creation!*" Rasped Floralstreak.

"*What did I tell you? The traitor is not to be trusted!*" Sneered Dovetail triumphantly. "*Oh shut up, will you?!*" Growled Elmriver, whipping her head back and glaring at the Shine with slitted eyes.

Had she made a mistake? Was she not supposed to follow her father? Goslingpaw felt despair etch into her heart as the BlazeClan cats around her began to argue.

All bickering was interrupted however, as a new voice cut through the air like claws slashing through flesh. "*Took you all long enough!*"

"*Continue to keep us waiting, why don't you all?*" The second voice laughed. At that, two toms leapt from the top of the RoadWalker structure, and strode towards the clan with confident steps.

One of the toms had the sleekest, glossy red fur Goslingpaw had

ever seen. Delicate stripes and swirls of a darker russet wove their way through his pelt, and glinting blue eyes shone with confidence bordering with amusement.

The second tom had beautiful, glossy silvery-grey fur and white swirls that etched delicate patterns into his pelt. His ears and tail tip were white, and the gentlest pair of earthy amber eyes gazed kindly at the clan.

But there was one thing noticeable about both toms. They both had wings too, just like Goslingpaw, and the silver tom even had a second pair of wings hidden under his first.

The two strangers stopped in front of the bristling clan, and the silver one spoke once more. *"I am Splash Sprint and this is my mate Russet Rush."*

"We come from the Northern Kingdoms, and we hail from the Tribe of The Blooming Valley."

Epilogue

The silver cat stirred lightly as she felt her brother step beside her, soft fur brushing together.

Her one good eye opened just a crack, revealing the colour of deep ice blue. Drawing her head upwards, she smiled as she locked eyes with the loving, leaf-green irises of her last surviving kin.

Her mother and father had died not long ago, and her sister had been stillborn, never before did she have the chance to breathe her first breath.

Her brother had grieved over their parents' deaths; she only grieved over her father. The hatred for her mother turning on her and taking away her eye would never cease.

Glacier Storm drew herself up gracefully and arched her back into an elegant stretch, before standing up tall and tilting her head at her brother.

And endearing smile stretched across the taller, sand-pelted tabby's face. His sister was shorter than him, height only boosted slightly by her tall ear tufts that only just reached the top of his head.

And yet she was more powerful than him, more revered and respected. She was more skilled too, and had the legendary, most desired for position as an Aether, a cryptid bearing all the powers as the members of their tribe.

He should hate her for this; seeing her reign was like a challenge to his reputation, but he didn't. He loved her as a mother owl would to her brood of freshly-hatched chicks.

Carefully, he ducked down and swept his head under his little sister's and touched his black and pink split nose to her shoulder with an affectionate purr.

"*My dear sister, Tarragon hailing from the Golden Rose Cult brings news I hope you'll be, ah... happy to hear about*," he rumbled in his gentle voice.

"*Do tell, my brother*." He fluffed out his wings and chuckled as a loose, tawny feather was shaken loose and drifted lazily to the ground.

"*Tarragon reports that Rippling Leaf's daughter is alive and kicking, and our local lovebirds Russet Rush and Splash Sprint have found them at what the humans call a train station by the mountains.*"

"*So she has been found*," remarked the silver she with a sigh. "*Good. Now let's hope she gets here safely and that Russet Rush stops yakking about fur enough to brief her on the code of us Valley Cats.*"

Her one blue eye glinted maliciously as she flexed her claws. "*Challengers are never good, and cats with a soul of lust for power have no room here in the Northern Kingdoms.*"

Trivia

• Rabbithum was crushed by a lorry when she was sitting vigil for Hazepaw.

• Beetlescar knew of Aldertrail and Azuregale's relationship because he'd seen how close the two were with each other.

• Swanpaw is actually bisexual but she's hidden deep in the closet because of her mother.

• Dovetail is homophobic.

• The two cats at the end are Splash Sprint and Russet Rush. They're mates and you can find out more about their past on my YouTube channel.

• The reason only Goslingpaw has wings is because her father was a cryptid, a cat born with wings while Dovetail wasn't. Her wings developed late due to how undernourished and weak she was and the fall into icy water slowed it down further. If she hadn't fallen trough the water her wings would've developed fully by chapter 7.

• Lichenfrost did not support Beetlescar trying to overthrow Azurestar because she knew how much more powerful the silver tom was in combat and she has far more sense than her brother.

• Stonepaw has ADHD.

• Hailkit is autistic.

• Aldertrail is insomniac and uses herbs to get herself to sleep at night.

• The text on the wall in chapter 6 translates to "Turn Towards The Sun" in Shadish, a language spoken by the Valley Cats. They are similar to SeaWings in some way, only they do not have any scribes and they cannot read human language. They can only understand and read Shadish. (Pronounced Shade-ish)

• Lichenfrost is the older sibling.

• Swanpaw tried to drown Goslingpaw because her mother told her to 'get rid of the evil within BlazeClan'.

• Dovetail is completely delusional. She actually preferred Swanpaw from the start since they were born, believing the pure white kit as a symbol of purity and peace, and when Rippling Leaf died this only fuelled the thought even more.

• Beechwhisker has a Caribbean accent.

• Tarragon is actually not a spirit; she was born with the gift to walk in others' dreams and used her ability, which is called Dreamstalking, to visit Goslingpaw. However when she visits another cat/cryptid in their dreams, she takes on the ethereal appearance of a ghost.

• Rippling Leaf calls Goslingpaw a hatchling because around the time she and her sister were born he had seen a nest of wren eggs hatching being tended to by its parents.

• Rippling Leaf took a liking to Goslingkit pretty fast, but instead of naming her Wrenkit he decided to call her Goslingkit because her colouration seemed to resemble a goose more at that time.

Character Showcase

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Once again I bring to you a character showcase because I'm suffering from severe writer's block just about now.

This is Berrytrail, the Nettle who received the prophecy that started it all. A dedicated healer with a track record for being able to memorise herb locations faster than a Claw could run, she is one of the most experienced healers and a good ally to have on your side.

This is Vinespring, the shy Nettle who used to dream of being a Shine. Once cold and bitter for not becoming one, she soon grew to enjoy her role as a healer more as she witnessed the brutal ways the Claws treated their mates. She is not the most empathetic cat out there, but she tries her best for her patients.

This is Beechwhisker, Slatepaw's mentor. In a clan of sexist, arrogant toms, his sweet and gentle nature is alien to them, but he's not completely the only one. He cares for his apprentice dearly and likes to climb trees together to catch squirrels. He is a potential candidate for the next deputy.

Poor Cottonsong is a victim of severe emotional manipulation and now has the tough task of raising four kits as her own. She wants the be the best mother she can be but she can't help but hate herself for not being able to keep her mate close like the other Shines can.

Beetlescar is a perfect example of 'biting off more than one can chew'. Relying too much on brute strength and body mass to bring his opponents down, it's no wonder he was defeated so easily by Azuregale, who was by far faster and could land more blows on his clumsy self. Unlike his sister, he has not come any further than where he was initially, and his stubbornness might just lead to his inevitable demise.

Lichenfrost is here, and she's changed a bit since the first book, it

appears. Initially flaunting her power and status for all to see, she's reflected on her actions alone, putting herself in the paws of her fellow she-cats and their pain. After witnessing the lack of reaction her father had when Cottonsong and her kits were rejected, she vowed never to turn out like him and is trying her best to change.

Here's Thornslash, the overprotective father who has a crush on Azuregale. Thornslash takes pride in his son and is determined for Depthpaw to turn out like him, though his son secretly just wishes he'd just leave him alone. He's unfortunately far too deep into BlazeClan's horrible ways, and does not understand why Azuregale is so against it. He holds a deep hatred towards Aldertrail for 'stealing' Azuregale's attention away.

Here's Floralstreak, Swanpaw's unfortunate mentor. Initially a boastful she-cat who liked the stimulating thrill of seeing which tom she could get as a mate next, she's grown to learn the harsh truth of the world. Nevertheless, she still enjoys some attention to be on her, but heralds a great dislike for Swanpaw's over-the-top theatrics to keep the clan focused on her and only her.

This furball here is Thrushpounce, Cootpaw's mentor. He's a terrible influence to his apprentice and Lilynose's mate. However, unlike most toms, he's not eager to have kits and doesn't pressure Lilynose into mating as much as most other toms do. He and the Shine only share mutual understanding as Lilynose does not desire kits either, and both cats usually just leave each other alone.

Finally, here's Gustfang, the gruff BlazeClan tom with a heart of gold beneath. He truly loves his sons and has a soft spot for Softpaw due to him sympathising with the traumatised Starpaw and viewing her as if she was his own child. Towards Goslingpaw, he finds her way of living interesting, and he secretly admires her resilience to carry on despite all the hardships thrown her way.